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THORNEY HALL :

A STORY OF AN OLD FAMILY.

By HOLME LEE,
AUTHOR OF "MAUDE TALBOT."



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THORNEY HALL.

I.

THE village of Thorney is in Wensleydale ; the old hall stands on the brow of a hill to the north of it, and looks across rich sweeps of cultivated land to the distant moors. Through the valley winds the river Ure ; sometimes lost to sight amidst groups of noble trees, and sometimes gleaming like a silver thread athwart the shadowy, tinted fields. To the right lies Middleham, with its castle towering in grim ruined majesty over the town ; to the left, and nearer, rises Thorney Scaur, crowned with a ridge of dark firs ; beyond and above stretches a dim line

of far-away hills, melting into the clouds like a wreath of dun mist ; whilst, in the middle distance, a curl of white smoke betrays, here and there, the nestling-place of some village or isolated farmhouse.

The garden-front of Thorney Hall faces southward to the valley, and on that side are all the principal apartments ; the grand entrance being at the west end. It is a large, irregular, rambling house ; picturesque from its situation, from the traces of antiquity which centuries have graven on it, and the fine overshadowing elms behind, rather than from any architectural beauty of its own. It is well kept and orderly ; quiet and secluded : the gravel-sweep from the griffin-guarded gate to the door shows no wheel-marks ; the lawn is smooth as velvet ; the hedges of laurel and prickly holly which divide the upper and lower terraces are cut with mathematical precision, and the wilderness is intersected by numerous box-edged paths.

II.

Eighty years ago things were very different here : the grounds were then a tangled desolation ; Riot and Conviviality were the household gods, whilst Ruin kept watch at the gates, unappalled by the griffins. This was in Squire Ralph's time. He ran through his property at an immense pace ; mortgaged acre after acre of the lands that had been in his family six hundred years, until by and by that gaunt porter came up and sat at his elbow daily, lowering on him threateningly during his noisy festivities, and pertinaciously intruding a portentous account in every moment of solitude.

After enduring this ghastly company for some months with alternate defiance and trembling, Squire Ralph died suddenly : *how* was long a mystery. People spoke of it in awed whispers under their breath. The East-room, where the old man came by his death, was shut up ; and his dust was consigned to the family vault in Thorney Church without any of those respectable ceremonies which had hallowed the repose of his progenitors.

III.

Squire Ralph left three children : a daughter, approaching middle age, and two young sons by a second wife. Miss Grisell Randal was in possession of her mother's fortune : the boys had nothing. The property was sold to cover the enormous debts that Squire Ralph had contracted ; and Miss Grisell bought in the old Hall, intending to live there, and keep a home for her brothers so long as they should need one.

The largest purchaser of the dismembered estates was a Mr Nevil, a sort of far-away cousin of the Randals, who lived up in Swaledale, in a gloomy old mansion that had been built out of the ruins of a priory. It was a great disappointment to this gentleman not to obtain Thorney Hall with the land ; and, though the intercourse between the two families had always been of the most distant kind, he took upon himself to advise Miss Grisell as to what it would be best for her to do in her difficult circumstances. She, however, declined his interfer-

ence, and curtly stated her resolve to do what seemed right in her own eyes, without reference to the opinion of the world in general. Thenceforward she went steadily on in her own way, utterly disregarding the censures passed on her. A thorough revolution took place at the Hall: the numerous servants were discharged; the extensive stables demolished; the state apartments, with their faded, battered furniture, as Squire Ralph had left it, were locked up; and the wild, tangled gardens gradually reduced to order.

No guests were admitted; casual passers-by on the high-road might occasionally see Miss Randal, clad in deep mourning, a straw hat on her head and thick gauntlets on her hands, helping and overlooking an old serving-man as he worked in the grounds; but beyond this nobody's surveillance could go. There was little enough in this lady's way of life to excite curiosity; nevertheless people talked about her until they persuaded themselves that she was a mysterious character, to be watched with interest and suspicion: when she was mentioned chairs were drawn more closely together, and voices sunk to a whisper; Mr Marchbank, the

curate, who educated the boys, returned evasive replies to all the inquisitorial demands of his fair acquaintance ; and his daughter Mary, who was the only person admitted to Miss Randal's privacy, was equally impracticable. Finally, it was settled that she was rather *odd* ; and, as such, open to pity, ridicule, or misconstruction, according as the observer's mind inclined. The Hall also got a bad name, and few of the villagers cared to pass by its gloomy avenue after dusk.

Meanwhile Miss Randal carried out the plan she had laid of launching into life her two young brothers. Godfrey, the elder, obtained a commission in the army, and Percival was preparing for the church. For some months after Godfrey left Thorney, his sister kept herself, if possible, more secluded than ever ; but, having become a standard topic of speculation and gossip, people could not afford to let her slip from their minds and be forgotten. The few who were so fortunate as to encounter her in her rare walks beyond the limits of the grounds were unanimous in saying that she appeared quite an elderly care-worn woman, although they very well knew she could not be over
...

IV.

Godfrey had not been gone much more than a year, when rumour began to couple his name with some very strange stories. It was then that the restless spirit was seen to haunt the twilight gardens : no ghost, as the superstitious people asserted, but Grisell Randal in the flesh, more sad, more stern, and more gloomy even than formerly. This time and place were her confessional. Here she could put off her mask of calm endurance, and acknowledge herself before God to be a miserable, disappointed woman. Here she could weep : here she *did* weep, such tears as leave deep barren furrows in the heart, that no after-time can efface. It was carelessly said that Godfrey Randal was proving himself a true son of his father, and imitating him in all his evil ways, and that this was mainly attributable to his having had no firmer guide than his sister. She heard the accusation in silent bitterness. Under the unobtrusive quietness of her exterior there must have lain a wonderful energy

and strength of character, to enable her to support her life-long martyrdom with the fortitude she evinced. Her youth had been one prolonged winter: ice-bound, storm-wrecked, desolate: every virtue, save the negative one of passive endurance, had perished slowly of inanition within her breast, leaving her a cold, severe, unattractive woman; but still capable of poignant suffering. Godfrey had been her darling—her spoilt darling; and even those who condemned were fain to pity her. Ere-long his excesses became matter of painful notoriety, and it was said that he had been obliged to leave the army. This, however, was not true at that time.

V.

One bleak February day, whilst Mr Nevil was busy turning over in his mind the propriety of a second time offering his advice to his independent kinswoman, she surprised him with a visit. He received her cordially, being a punctilious man, and would have entered on a series of unmeaning inquiries and compliments; but she cut him short,

and came straight to her point at once. She wished to sell Thorney Hall: was he disposed to purchase?

Mr Nevil was not a mean man exactly, but he liked a bargain when he could get it. Here was an opportunity.

Might he ask why Miss Randal desired to be rid of the Hall? No, he might not. Slightly confused, Mr Nevil stammered out something about the place having got a bad name; to which his kinswoman replied, that she had imagined she should have to deal with an educated gentleman, and not with an ignorant rustic; whilst she fixed her eyes on his face with an expression of gloomy contempt.

Ten lawyers would have been more easily managed than this one outspoken disagreeable woman.

Mr Nevil alluded to his man of business; Miss Randal rose to put an end to the interview.

"Her necessity," she said, "was immediate: if he did not wish to possess the Hall, it was enough; she knew one who did; but as her kinsman had formerly been desirous of purchasing, she had thought it just to give him the first chance; espe-

cially," she added, "as she should not like to see the old place pass altogether into the hands of strangers."

Mr Nevil begged her to be seated once more, and to enter on the discussion calmly : matters of importance were not to be hastily decided on. But calmness and discussion were not in Grisell Randal's mood that morning ; and her kinsman, fearful of losing what his heart coveted, if he suffered her to depart with the treaty unconcluded, was drawn into a hasty arrangement ; paid over part of the purchase-money, and congratulated himself on his new acquisition.

The snow was falling thick on Colster Fell as Miss Randal rode away : no entreaties could induce her to break bread under Mr Nevil's roof ; neither did she draw rein again until she came in sight of home.

"It came by a woman, and it has gone by a woman," said she to herself, looking sadly at the grand old mansion. "There will be no more Rands of Thorney. Oh ! Godfrey, Godfrey, if the sacrifice save your good name, I begrudge it not. Honour before all the world !"

This was how Thorney old Hall passed into the hands of the Nevils.

VI.

Contrary to everybody's expectation, Miss Randal did not leave the neighbourhood, but settled herself in a cottage at the lower end of the village. It was not difficult to know where the purchase-money of the Hall went, for by and by there came fresh rumours of Godfrey's wildness and extravagance. To put the climax to his misdeeds, he grossly insulted his colonel, for which he was brought before a court-martial, and cashiered. He left England immediately ; and, after a little while had elapsed, Miss Grisell's cottage was shut up, and it was said that she had followed her disgraced brother into his miserable exile.

A short time previously, Percival had obtained a living at a distance, and married Mary Marchbank. His life was as tranquil and pure as Godfrey's was the reverse. He had a large family of sons and daughters, who, following various trades or professions, scattered themselves far and wide as

they grew up, and, also settling, brought new shoots to the old stock.

Percival Randal himself was growing an old man, when Miss Grisell came wandering back to Thorney. Godfrey was dead; and, having no other tie to the foreign land in which she had lived with him for more than twenty years, her weary feet turned longingly towards home. She was very poor, but her pride had not outlived her darling's honour; and now she made no secret of it: she was become a very humble, sorrowful woman. What her experiences had been during those twenty years, none ever knew, for no revelation passed her lips. She took up her abode once more in the cottage that she had formerly tenanted, and existed on a trifling pension which the children of her brother Percival collected amongst themselves.

Of these children my father was one: he was the third son, and had been brought up as a watch-maker. One of my earliest recollections is of being taken by him to see Miss Grisell Randal, whose name was always mentioned in our family with a reverence and honour rarely accorded to human beings, how exalted soever their nature may be.

My expectations had been raised in proportion to my awe of this unknown relative, who was the link that united us to the past greatness of our family, and who had personal recollections of Thorney Hall, the possession of which was now only a dim tradition amongst us.

I found a very aged woman, who supported her steps by the aid of a stick : she seemed to me taller than any one I had ever seen. Her countenance was clear, for she preserved all her faculties to the day of her death ; and her memory was still good, as in this interview she related to my father several anecdotes of her brother Percival, for whom we were just then all in mourning. Before we went away she called me to her, and made me read the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes, keeping her hand all the while on my head. She then gave me a curious ring off her finger, saying that I was the only true Randal left, and it was therefore right that I should have this trinket, which had been handed down from one daughter of the family to another, from time immemorial. I had been named Grisell after her, and my grandfather always said that I reminded him of his sister in the face.

This was the last and only time I ever saw Miss Grisell Randal. She died a few months after, and was buried in Thorney Church, in the family vault ; which has not been opened for any one since. Her funeral was a very large one. Many of the gentry sent their carriages in honour of her name : they spoke of her as the last descendant of a long line, and many stories were cited at her grave that had slept forgotten for years. It was on the evening of this day, when my father returned from the funeral, that Aunt Thomasine, who is unmarried, and a credible family chronicle, told me the traditions that I have here set down.

VII.

My father carried on his trade of watchmaker in the town of Burndale. Our house stood in Watergate ; it was one of those very ancient structures in which the first stories projected over the shops below, and which had gardens behind, down the slope to the river. Towards the street it was gloomy, but our sitting-room looked on the grass-

plot, with its beds of gay flowers, and to the swift, shallow stream beyond. My father had a little closet adjoining where he worked during the day or read in the evenings, when the children's bustle was too much for him.

There were four of us, of whom I was the eldest by several years; next came my sister Marian, then Alan, and lastly Hugh. Marian was rarely with us, for Aunt Thomasine had half adopted her; the two boys were at the Grammar School. For a month at midsummer, however, we all assembled at home, and I have a pleasant remembrance of those times, for my father, who was a strict disciplinarian, then somewhat relaxed his rule, and my mother's quiet face looked all the brighter for having her darlings around her. No separation took place amongst us until many years after Miss Grisell Randal's death; we went on the even tenor of our way; working to live, and on the whole a happy, united family.

I recall, especially, one evening when we were all together, just at the end of the holidays. Aunt Thomasine and Marian were to leave us on the following day, and perhaps we were a little graver

and stiller than was our wont, with this in prospect. My father sat in his customary place, with my mother opposite; Marian had perched herself on his knee, and with one white arm twined round his neck, and her soft, rosy lips pressed against his rugged cheek, she was trying to gain his consent to taking Alan away with her for a week. He was indisposed to yield, and yet he did not wish to grieve his pet; who knew, as well as he and all of us did, that she could, by her loving importunity, coax him to do everything she wanted. Hugh was, as usual, poring over a book as far from the company as he could get, and the rest of us were gathered about the open window. All at once Hugh's voice broke the silence which followed on the cessation of Marian's prattle, when she had gained her desire of my father.

"Are we descended from the old family of Fitz-Randal, mentioned in this book?" was his question.

"I believe we are," replied my father, carelessly.

"*Believe*, James! as if there could be any doubt of it: I cannot understand your apathy in matters of so much importance;" exclaimed Aunt Thomasine, sharply.

"You know, sister, I never did care so much about family as you;" said my father.

"Hugh, look here. You see that portrait over the chimney-piece?" The boy signified his assent. "It is Pierce Randal: he was a great scholar; there is the midnight lamp represented as burning on the table beside him, while a ray of dawn penetrates the window above. He killed himself by overmuch study."

"There is no fear that any of the Randals will do that now-a-days;" cried the lively, irreverent voice of my elder brother.

"No fear that *you* will, Alan:" retorted Aunt Thomasine, with dignity. She then, though somewhat nettled at the interruption, proceeded to give us a lengthy sketch of our ancestors: going back to some Château in Normandy, and arriving breathless at the Civil Wars. "Everard Randal was killed at Worcester, and his estates were seized by the parliament," said she; "he had an only son who retired into Flanders, but at the Restoration he came home and got his estates again. It is easy to trace ——"

Alan here once more put in his voice: coming

up to Hugh, and laying his hand on his shoulder, he said : " Well, Old Solemnity, are you going to burnish up the family honours, and rise like the Sphinx from the ashes ? "

" *Phoenix*, Alan : " in her turn, Aunt Thomasine interrupted.

" Oh ! never mind, it is all the same ! "

" No, Alan, it is *not*," emphatically said the old lady : and forthwith she plunged deep into the mists of antiquity, with a view of enlightening her indolent nephew, who yawned his intense disapproval thereof, pleading that explanations always puzzled him. But Miss Thomasine could not afford to lose this opportunity of displaying her erudition, and by and by she became involved in such Egyptian darkness, that it was a relief to all parties when my mother summoned us to the tea-table.

" We had just got into the labyrinth, Aunt ; you can finish telling us all about it after ; " wickedly said Alan. My father gave him an admonitory glance, which silenced him, and we all sat down.

We were nearly coming to a conclusion of the

meal when the door opened, and a very welcome, as well as frequent visiter at our house, appeared. Shouts of joy from the boys greeted him ; Cousin Harley was indeed a general favourite.

I do not remember any one for whom my father ever showed a stronger liking, although their ages were so far apart as scarcely to permit their intimacy to be called a friendship : it was rather the attachment of parent and son, for Cousin Harley had lost his father and mother early, and had been brought up amongst us. He now took his place at the table, and was assailed with questions : he had just returned from Edinburgh, where he had been to assist at the marriage of two cousins on his father's side. He gave us full particulars of the event.

" Well," said Aunt Thomasine, decisively ; " it may have been a very romantic and tender attachment, but for my part I cannot approve of such near relatives marrying."

" It is a thing I strongly object to," added my father : " indeed, I would never consent to any of my children forming such a connexion."

" You are perfectly right," subjoined Aunt Thomasine.

For a few moments the conversation flagged, but not long; the boys had too many questions to ask of their elder cousin to leave him to his own reflections. He, however, took leave of us early on the plea of fatigue; although I had never seen him look more cheerful than he did when he came in an hour before. My father bade me show him a light to the door, as the passage was dark. Cousin Harley detained me a second or two at the step, to tell me that he had some thoughts of settling in Edinburgh, and to ask me what I advised. I laughed at his serious face, for now I saw that he did look rather pale, and said that I could give no counsel till I had heard the whole case stated. He shook hands with me hurriedly, and went away without another word. When I returned to the parlour, I repeated what Cousin Harley had said. My mother raised her eyes quickly to mine.

"Indeed!" cried my father; "I never so much as heard such a thing blurted at. I must talk to him to-morrow. Harley is not used to be whimsy: where can this sudden freak have sprung from?" My mother and he exchanged a glance, and as my presence seemed to embarrass them, I rejoined the young ones, who were preparing for a round game

with Aunt Thomasine for leader. We were all very merry together, although Cousin Harley's secession was much bewailed.

VIII.

On the morrow, Marian and Aunt Thomasine departed, taking with them Alan, who thus gained a brief reprieve from school. A few days later, Cousin Harley also left Burndale. It so happened that I did not see him again after that night, for I was out of the house when he called ; but I understood that he had gone into his uncle's office as a clerk, and that the situation was much more advantageous for him than the one which he had held in Burndale. It was impossible to gain many particulars, for when I introduced the subject, my father and mother both seemed disinclined to continue it : whereupon I concluded that they were not altogether satisfied with the course he had adopted, and I ceased to refer to it any more.

But everybody missed him : my father, in his workroom during the evenings : my brothers, when

they were in any difficulty over their lessons; and all of us on the Sunday, when he had been in the habit of spending the whole day with us.

It is not long, however, that such a vacancy remains unfilled up. My father could not exist without some intelligent friend of his own sex to join him in leisure hours; for though he followed a mechanical trade, and laboured at it diligently, he was a man of superior education and ability. By and by, therefore, Cousin Harley's place was taken by a person hitherto a stranger to us; a new-comer to the town, but one who had brought with him a high reputation for learning: he could not be rich, however, as he took up his abode in one of the quaint, old houses, a few doors further down Watergate than ours, and hired only one elderly woman-servant. My mother did not like him at first, he was so grave and cynical; but after a while, as she grew accustomed to him, her opinion changed.

As Cousin Harley had done, Mr Langley soon learnt to prefer the common sitting-room to my father's closet, and they would carry on their discussions while we sat at work and silently mar-

velled at what we could not understand. Our awe diminished by degrees, when we found out how much warmth and kindness of heart lay hidden under his gravity of manner ; and the boys, Hugh especially, approved him. For my part, had he suddenly left us, the parlour would not have seemed like itself. Having no ostensible occupation, Mr Langley would now and then steal an hour from his morning studies to direct mine ; and though I was slow of comprehension, I cannot remember that he was ever put out of patience.

He had no garden behind his house, so he would come to ours and sit under a shady pear-tree reading, sometimes for a whole afternoon. Occasionally he would call out to me to take my sewing and join him, when he always closed his solid volume, and either told me some entertaining story from memory, or else read out one of those ancient ballads of which he was so fond.

He named me " Patient Grisell " in jest, but I told him that I did not believe that history : such tame women were no more real than talking trees and animals ; and that if I had been the earl's wife, I would have taught him very differently : at

which he laughed, and said he had not thought I was such a vixen. One day, after we had been sitting a long time silent on the steps leading down to the water, he suddenly asked me : "Grisell, do you ever look at anything but that piece of white linen?" I replied briefly, "Yes."

"Do you ever notice the rippling shadows on the river, the varying forms of the clouds, or the sunlight playing amongst the flowers?"

I had my fancies, but I kept them to myself: we were a practical people at our house, and I did not wish to be thought romantic or visionary; so I said nothing, though I did feel rather mortified that he, who seemed penetrating elsewhere, should have totally misunderstood me.

"I wonder what that grave, little head thinks about all day," he added, finding that I was not going to reply to his previous question: "I suppose you *do* think, Grisell, now and then?" I could feel his eyes fixed searchingly on my face, which flushed under his scrutiny:—I believe I was rather annoyed, and showed it, for he changed his tone all at once.

"Will you trust yourself in the boat with me?" he asked, gaily.

We had a small boat, moored to a ring in the wall close by the steps, into which I had never yet ventured; though Hugh and Alan went out in it frequently. I did not hesitate to reply that I would go, but proposed that I should first tell my mother. Mr Langley, however, said there was no need, as he would not row far; and in we got. Instead of proceeding towards the open country, he rowed down the river between the dark old houses towards the bridge: I looked at the broad, black shadows they cast on the water, and wished myself safely back at the garden steps.

The river was not navigable here for large craft; but several boats shot by, whose occupants looked curiously at me with my uncovered hair, which the breeze had loosened, floating wildly on my neck. Mr Langley talked on of foreign towns and lands that he had seen, without observing my condition. I longed to ask him to row back, but while I was hesitating the boat floated under the gloomy shadow of the bridge, struck against something, and in an instant we were in the water. One quick thought of my mother, of my companion, and home, flashed lightning-like through my heart; the next

moment I lost consciousness, and all was dark. I can recall that sensation with sickening distinctness, even yet.

We were both rescued very speedily by some boatmen, who were on the staith at the moment our boat upset, and who conveyed us home. When I regained my senses, I was lying on my own bed ; my father, my mother, and our family doctor were in the room. I essayed to speak, but was told to be silent. This did not check me, however, until I had learnt that Mr Langley was safe, and that no worse consequences were to be apprehended from our mishap than, perhaps, a severe cold ; to guard against which, I was condemned to my room for several days, though exceedingly impatient of the restraint.

When permitted to descend to the parlour, the first person I saw was the companion of my unlucky aquatic expedition. He did not refer to it then, for there were several people in the room ; but afterwards, when I had got leave to take a few minutes walk on the lawn, he expressed his regret for the danger he had led me into, more feelingly and humbly than I liked to hear. I am sure I had

forgiven him long before; but he made me repeat the assurance over and over again ere he would be satisfied. From that day forward his manner towards me changed: he became less cynical and far kinder. He gave me more of his attention, too, during my studies; and I really think, if his lessons had continued long, I might have overcome my natural slowness of understanding—but they did not.

Of all the happy times of my life, I can recall none happier than this—none half so happy.

IX.

The second son of Mr Nevil of Thorney Hall was at Burndale Grammar School at this time; he was one of Alan's chief friends there, and Hugh, though younger, was also one of his intimates. It happened, a few weeks before the holidays, that Nevil was accidentally hurt in the playground, and obliged to be sent home. He soon after forwarded a message to Hugh to go over and see him the first half-holiday.

Accordingly, the next Saturday afternoon, burdened with some quaint old books that he imagined might prove entertaining to his friend during his forced confinement to the house, Hugh set off, and accomplished the six miles which divide Burndale from Thorney in something more than an hour. The day was very close and sultry, the roads glaring with white dust, and it was in the heat of mid-day when he started; but the consciousness that he was doing a kind action brightened up his countenance, and he felt quite benevolent when he turned into the shady avenue from the unsheltered highway. Mr Nevil, a very pompous, proud man, was pacing backwards and forwards before the house when Hugh approached it; he paused and let the boy advance to where he stood.

“Is John better to-day, sir?” asked my brother, in his very best and civilest style.

“My son is very ill indeed. Pray, who are you who have come so far, if I may judge from your clothes, to inquire after him?” said Mr Nevil, looking him down from head to foot with a supercilious expression.

“My name is Randal,” replied Hugh, sturdily.

"What! the son of the watchmaker in the Watergate?" demanded the gentleman.

"The same," answered the boy, flushing scarlet through his swarthy skin.

"Your meaning in coming here to-day is good, possibly, but I must decline all such intimacies for my son." And, with a stiff bow, Mr Nevil turned from him and resumed his interrupted walk.

As Hugh went back towards the gate, still heavily loaded with the old books which he had brought for his school-mate's gratification, his rage and mortification almost choked him: more than once he had to raise his hand to brush away the tears that filled his burning eyes. So rarely was it that he attempted a perfectly disinterested action, that having his kindness thrown back thus rudely in his face was enough to make him vow never to be guilty of such folly again.

I had seen him leave the house spruced up, and looking cheerful and animated; I now saw him returning, hot, tired, and dusty, with a heavy scowl on his brow, and his lips pressed together, as if he had an enemy between them whose life he was crushing out with savage tenacity. He passed

hastily through the shop and entered the parlour, where my father sat at a desk with a ledger before him, and flung the books down on a cushioned settle which extended along one side of the small room. My father pushed up his spectacles on his bald forehead, and, peering inquisitively at Hugh, asked what was the matter now.

“ I have been fool enough to go after John Nevil, who is ill ; and his father ordered me off like a beggar ! ” replied my brother ; all his pent up wrath now blazing forth in our familiar presence. “ I have walked twelve miles, with all those books, this blazing day, for that ! He would not have spoken to that ass, Clayton, as he did to me ; but my father keeps a shop, and so I’m not to expect civility.”

My father laughed a low satirical laugh. “ You always had a hankering after great folks, Hugh,” said he, “ maybe you will keep out of their way for the future. You see the gentry and the trading classes are not of the same make. They are copper gilt, and we are copper in the ore, or just polished up a bit by such an education as circumstances bless us with. But we show we are only copper,

while such as Mr Nevil pass for gold with those who are not used to metals, and who only find them out when the fine gilding wears off at the edges and corners, and betrays what is underneath. Now Mr Nevil rubbed off a little of his gilding, and showed you the natural man, when he was uncourteous to you, who meant to show his son a kindness. He does not value an individual according to his merit, but his circumstances. If you had said you were a son of Clayton at the Manor House, he would have bowed down to you as heir to a richer man than himself; but as you only belong to Randal the watchmaker, he turns his back on you. Well! it is not worth while being angry about it! Mr Nevil is not remarkable for wisdom; and besides, he has a spite against me, which may account for his rudeness. I daresay he has not forgotten the letter he got from the radical watchmaker, with the twenty sovereigns he sent him by a safe hand during the last election time, when he half-ruined himself, and was defeated to boot."

"I shall not go to Thorney again in a hurry! That proud old idiot would have been a beggar on the high road, or a pauper in a workhouse, if he

had not come into the world and found his bread ready made for him," returned Hugh, bitterly. "You are twice as much a man as he is, father. He is only a perambulating bolster, stuffed with shreds and patches of family pride, prejudice, ignorance, and stupidity."

"Don't rant, Hugh!" said my father, smiling. "Keep out of the way of those supercilious gentlefolks, and they will not gall you. But never trust them, whatever you do. For a smooth, sleek promiser, commend me to a man like Nevil of Thorney. Promises are like paper-money, of no intrinsic value; and worth nothing to the holder unless they be payable on demand; so never take them if you have them offered to you by hundreds. That is advice coined in the mint of my own experience, and I would counsel you to carry it about with you for a lucky penny: it will prove a real loadstone for attracting, you will discover." With these words my father took up the ledger and retreated into his work-closet.

As he went, Hugh turned to gather up the books, and restored them to their places on their shelves. I felt for his annoyance and mortification, because

there was that in his disposition which might turn to harshness and bitterness as readily as to a better frame of mind, if early impressions so inclined him. I spoke to him soothingly.

"I don't know how it comes that John Nevil, who is one of the frankest, heartiest fellows at our school, should have such a father!" he said in reply: "it is not perhaps, after all, worth being angry about; but you would not have liked it yourself, Grisell."

"Certainly not; I should have felt very much hurt."

"He has forgotten who were masters of Thorney before his father. Aunt Thomasine would say, we are his equals any day: yes, and his betters, if it comes to old blood and name!" I could not repress a smile.

"And I should say that I hope Hugh Randal will be his superior on some higher ground than that, or he will be a very useless person in this world, and might as well be released from the dignity of cumbering the ground at once," answered I.

"Don't bear malice, boy;" was Aunt Thomasine's admonition to Hugh, when he afterwards

repeated to her the circumstances of his visit to Thorney; "you will continually find that money and a certain position license very empty heads to bear themselves exceeding proudly. Let them be: in nine cases out of ten, they are reckoned at their real worth. What do people say of Mr Nevil generally? Old Biddy Waters, at the post, calls him "a poor creature;" and Mr Clayton, one of his friends, and a man of his own class, makes no secret of the contempt in which he holds him: even Joseph Taft, the constable, declared to my Jane, that they might as well have a wooden h'effigy on the magistrate's bench as Squire Nevil. You profess to despise him, yet you have let his discourtesy mortify you: I would be ashamed to do it if I were you, nephew."

Hugh asserted that he had ceased to care about it, and cited in proof his unbroken friendship for John, who after the holidays returned to the Grammar School. He ceased to feel mortified, perhaps; but forget it he certainly did not.

X.

Alan, as the elder son, was destined by our father to follow his own trade ; but the boy's taste, unhappily, inclined to more stirring pursuits. On this subject arose grievous dissension as the period approached when some decision must be made ; the one would not abate an iota of his authority as a parent, while the other steadily asserted his right to choose for himself. There was a strong contrast between my brothers, as well in personal appearance as in mental and moral qualities. Hugh's features were less regularly handsome than Alan's, but his countenance was altogether more striking. His brow was broad and massive—so massive, indeed, that there always seemed a shadow over his eyes, except when his rare smile shone in them with a grave light ; the lower part of his face was good : the lips clearly cut and firm, the nostril thin, the chin cleft and small. In figure, he was, for his age, tall and athletic, with well knit limbs that betrayed both activity and strength ; all his move-

ments, from his steady, even footstep, to the keenly deliberative glance of his deeply-set grey eyes, showed decision and firmness.

Very different was it with Alan. His light, pleasure-loving temperament had its index in his low, white forehead, full lips, and feeble chin. Hitherto everybody around him had been accustomed to yield to his will ; and wherever he went he made friends : people liked his gay, generous spirit, and while Hugh, with ten times his talent, and a far higher type of character, passed unnoticed by the many, he won favour and affection without an effort. Whilst he was a child, my father had looked on his waywardness with more indulgence than he was disposed to accord to it now that it thwarted his own will : perhaps he drew the reins too suddenly and harshly ; but wherever the blame rested, the result was, that Alan's seeming pliancy of disposition changed into a sullen, resentful obstinacy. The atmosphere of our pleasant parlour was quite changed now that disunion had crept in amongst us. Often and often had my gentle, trembling mother to interpose between her husband and her favourite child ; but her mediation could not

avail much between two such opposite tempers, and no sooner was one grievance accommodated, than another arose. Mr Langley privately counselled my father to let Alan have his own way ; but he scouted the idea of yielding to a youth who, he said, was never of the same mind two days together.

It happened while the discussion was at its highest, that a party of strolling players came to Burndale. If there was one amusement to which my father was more averse than another it was theatrical entertainments, especially of the kind offered by these wandering companies. He would read a play in his closet, but he designated the stage the " devil's ante-room," and of course my brothers were forbidden on pain of severe penalties to approach the booth which the strollers had erected in the market-place. Alan asked my mother to exert her influence to obtain a withdrawal of the veto for this once, but to no purpose ; and, despairing of gaining the permission he sought, he set my father's commands at defiance, and went without it.

It was late at night when he returned ; my mother

was with me in my room, and my father had remained alone below to receive him. I know not what we feared, but we held our breath to listen when we heard the street door unbarred. The two went into the parlour, and presently their voices were heard in loud contention, and some fierce blows were struck; my mother rushed down stairs, and I followed her half-way. Alan came out of the room pale with anger, and would have passed us, but my mother caught his arm.

“Tell me, Alan, you have not struck your father, have you?” said she. He wrenched himself loose from her, replying that he had not; and mounted the stairs hastily.

For a few days after this, not a word was exchanged between my father and Alan; but I noticed that the lad hung particularly about his mother, and not a sign of his old gaiety appeared.

It was our custom in going to church on the Sunday evenings to leave one of the boys to keep house. It was Alan's turn on the Sabbath following this quarrel, and we left him as usual. During the afternoon, Mr Langley had called and taken my father out for a walk in the fields. Hugh

accompanied them ; but Alan stayed with us in the garden. Knowing that my mother wished to talk to him, I left them and strolled about by myself. When I rejoined them, I saw that both had been weeping, though Alan strove to look calm and cold.

In returning home after the evening service, Mr Langley came up to us and walked on to the house : we found the door ajar, and the parlour empty. " Disobedient boy, he has gone out on the river again, though I forbade him," was my father's observation ; but there was an expression of affright in my mother's face that I had never seen before : she signed to me to follow her from the parlour, and when we had gained my room she told me what her fears were.

" He spoke so fiercely, yet so despondingly to me this afternoon, that at the moment I felt your father would lose all hold on him if he urged him much further," said she with quivering lip. " I do not believe he has gone out for an hour's pleasure, Grisell :—no—I think he has left home for good, without any intention of coming back. Oh ! Alan, my poor, unhappy boy !" Looking out from the window by which I was standing, I saw the

boat still fastened in its place, and for the first time the probability of what my mother suggested forced itself into my mind.

“ Had you not better tell my father what you suspect ? ” said I.

“ Yes ; call him to come here a minute. ”

I did so ; but he pooh, poohed the notion ; and passing into Alan’s room he made us observe that not anything had been removed :—that the boy’s greatcoat lay where he had thrown it in the morning, with even his prayer-book and purse in the breast-pocket.

“ Come away and make tea for us ; Alan will turn up again before it is over, ” he added, carelessly : though I fancied some lurking anxiety troubled even him.

How every trivial circumstance of that miserable day has imprinted itself on my memory ! My mother spoke not a word ; and while Mr Langley talked of some recent and interesting discoveries, my father’s ear was painfully open to every sound passing in the quiet streets. We lingered over the meal so long, that Hugh, who did not share our fears, reached down a heavy volume which was

considered suitable for Sunday reading, on account of its solid appearance, vellum cover, and Aunt Thomasine's tradition that it had come down from the Pierce Randal aforementioned, and began to read. The rustling of the leaves, as he turned them over, seemed to torture my father, and I whispered to him to put it away.

"This room feels close; don't you think so, Langley? Let us take a turn on the bridge," said my father. So unusual a proposal from him betrayed the anxiety he had striven to conceal. Mr Langley assented; and when my mother brought her husband his gloves, I overheard her tremulous whisper—"If you *should* meet the poor boy, James, be kind to him—be considerate:—promise me." He moved his head, too agitated to speak, and the two went out together.

They were absent for an hour or more: when they returned, ten had struck by the clock of the parish church; and though it was a fine moonlight night, the air was keen and sharp. My father tried to conceal his feelings with words that sounded peculiarly harsh.

"Goodnight, Langley," said he: "we will take

no farther trouble for the lad ; a night out on the moor will do him no great harm : he will come back to-morrow morning with a sharp appetite for breakfast. Hugh, my boy, it is time you were in bed."

Hugh begged to sit up to let his brother in should he return.

" I tell you no !—Grisell, go to your own room. Ruth (to my mother), why do you cry ?—He does not deserve it : come away to your bed."

There was no gainsaying my father's commands, and we all went up stairs. I did not attempt to undress, but sat looking out over the wide valley which stretched beyond the town for miles. There was a fine moon, and the course of the river was marked all along its windings by a thick mist, white as a snow-drift ; the ridge of moors was sharply defined against the sky, and the trees in the garden cast inky shadows on the ghastly, hoar-frosted lawn.

Once I thought I saw a figure moving amongst them ; I opened my window softly, and advanced my head to examine ; just then it came forward into the light, and I saw it was my father. He went down the path to the steps, and stood there a

long while looking at the water: once he descended them, and stooped forward to peer along the face of the wall against which the ripples washed. What a terrible possibility had suggested itself to him!—what might he have seen in the deathly moonlight, looking out reproachfully from the dark river into his stern eyes! Presently he came back, with his head bent down on his breast and his hands behind him. He entered the house and drew the rusty bolts across the door. He had no more hope for that night. Though I felt indignant at his hard words, I am sure he suffered, and perhaps more than any of us, for self-reproach must have mingled with his fears.

When all in the house had been still about half an hour, a sound of footsteps came to my door: I opened it cautiously. It was Hugh, fully dressed, with his boots in his hand.

“I fancy I know where Alan will have gone, Grisell, and I’m going to see and try to get him to come back,” said he: he’ll have taken a cut across the country to Thorney Woods, and he’ll go to Aunt Thomasine.”

This was the most likely suggestion that had yet been made; but I did not see what good Hugh was

to do by going in pursuit, and said so : I advised him to relinquish his project ; but he was unwilling.

“ If it gets about the town that Alan has run away, my father will be twice as hard should he come back,” said he.

I felt that too : it would be cruelly galling to my father, who prided himself on his strict discipline, to know that people spoke of the way in which his authority was set at nought. Seeing that Hugh was determined to go, I offered to accompany him ; but, mere lad as he was, he scouted the idea of being afraid, and I saw him set off without any fear but that our father might detect his absence, and be displeased.

Thorney was nearly six miles from Burndale by the high road. By the fields across which Hugh purposed going, it was scarcely five. He was hardly out of sight ere the wildness of his project struck me forcibly, and I blamed myself for having suffered him to go ; but there was then no help for it, and I could only pray that no harm might befall him on the road : if he managed all the rest of his enterprise as skilfully as his noiseless exit from the house, it would be well.

Everybody in our home was wakeful that sad

night ; and, when the dawn began to peep, I listened for Hugh's return each instant. He had promised me that if he did not find Alan at Aunt Thomasine's he would not stay a moment there.

Almost earlier than I expected he reappeared before me covered with dust, and ready to drop with fatigue.

"He has never been there," were his first words ;
"he must have taken some other direction."

"Well, my good little Hugh, then you have lost your labour ; but you have the satisfaction of knowing you have done what you could," said I : now go to bed and get some rest, for you must need it sadly."

"Not I : father is moving about in his room, and will be down presently—I'll go and change my things.—Aunt Thomasine promised not to tell my father of my going ; but she intends to come over to-morrow : 'to keep the family together,' she says."

"And about Alan—what does she think ?" I asked.

"Oh ! she cried, and was cross at the same time, but did not seem to know who she ought to be angry with, so she railed at us all," Hugh replied.

My father being heard to go down to the parlour, we thought it advisable to separate; and as my brother went to his room, I sought my mother's. She turned her pale, sorrowful face to me as I entered, saying: "Oh! Grisell, where has my poor Alan been all this long night?"

I knew not what to reply; but I comforted her as well as I could; and at length, worn out with weeping and watching, I saw her fall into a heavy sleep, which lasted several hours. I made breakfast for my father, who was gloomy and silent: he did not once refer to the disappearance of Alan; and when Mr Langley came with the brief question—"Any tidings of the boy?" he only shook his head.

Before the day was over, our family was the town's talk: such an event was a perfect godsend to the gossips of the community, who distorted it into every conceivable shape. I do not think so many people had been in our shop for a month before as found their watches out of order on that memorable Monday. Aunt Thomasine arrived about tea-time, kindly, yet fussy and important as usual. She came alone, having left Marian in

charge of her old servant, as she did not propose to remain more than one night.

XI.

"Now, James, let me hear the rights and the wrongs of this unfortunate business," said the old lady, when we were sitting round the table after tea. Every particular, so far as we knew it, was detailed to her: her countenance growing sourer and sourer as she listened.

"Well, brother, I think with Ruth that the poor boy is to be pitied: parental authority has its limits as well as royal authority." Having delivered which dictum, Aunt Thomasine leant back for a minute majestically in her chair. "I do not wish to blame you, James," she added: "no blame can attach to you."

"Oh dear, no!" murmured my mother, laying her hand softly on my father's arm. He raised his face suddenly, and looked round upon us.

"I was too severe with the lad: I acknowledge it," he said hoarsely.

“Yes, James, you should have been contented to guide, without driving him,” interrupted Aunt Thomasine: “no good ever yet came of forcing any boy’s inclinations.” My mother seemed pained at this speech. It was plain, too, that my father felt it deeply: he had a great respect for his sister’s opinion, she being a strong-minded woman, older than himself, and such a reproach from her lips carried more weight than it would have done from those of any other person.

“What is going to be done?” asked she: “you cannot abandon a boy of fifteen to his own devices, without an attempt to recover him. What I advise is, that you, James, should go up to town,—runaways always turn to London naturally,—put advertisements in the papers, and do all that you can to bring him home, if he is found there. If you do not find him—well, we must hope that he will get on in his own fashion, and not become a disgrace to the family. We have heard of youths of his age being turned adrift in the world to make their own way, and doing it very well indeed. Don’t fret, Ruth: it is grievous, certainly, but it is not an irreparable calamity, we will trust.” Aunt Thoma-

sine intended to cheer us, I am sure ; and for the purpose she cited all the stories of extraordinary rises in fortune that she could recollect, from "Whittington and his cat" downwards to our time. I think we all went to bed weary rather than consoled.

Aunt Thomasine's counsel was followed, and my father went to London. He remained there nearly a month, but could gain no tidings of the boy. For some time hope buoyed up my mother's spirits, but when a letter came to say that he was returning unsuccessful, she sank into a pitiable melancholy.

XII.

On the night that we expected him home, I remained till late, pacing the garden-walks, and listening to the wind, which rushed in fitful sobs over the hills, as if a wild pang at its heart, after lying mute all the long day, were breaking forth in the darkness into irrepressible wailings. Mr Langley came out to me, and, drawing my hand through his arm, we walked up and down, conversing at intervals. It seemed almost wicked, I thought, that at this un-

happy time I had a quiet joy, all my own, hidden away in my heart, unknown and unshared by any ; yet so it was. The glow of a sunny morning had broken over me ; these scattered clouds, though heavy with storms on the horizon, could not obscure it.

Presently we heard the sounds of an arrival, and returned to the parlour together. It was my father ; but he was not alone : Cousin Harley was with him. Hasty though subdued greetings were exchanged amongst us. It was sad to see how a month had altered both my parents, my father especially : his hair had become perfectly white, and his voice sounded broken and feeble. He gave us a recital of what he had done and where he had been : how more than once he had been certain that he was on the track of the fugitive, but on following the clue to its end had found only disappointment. We learnt that Cousin Harley had joined him, dividing his toil and his anxiety ; and I could not help giving him a grateful look in acknowledgment of his kindness to us all. That night I thought he seemed more reserved with me than formerly ; but it might be only fancy, for the next morning, before he left us to return to Edin-

burgh, he spoke to me when we were alone in the parlour just as he used to do.

"If any thing should happen, Grisell," said he, "you know where to look for help and counsel. I shall always be ready to come to you in any emergency, remember. Distance is nothing. I have no greater pleasure than in feeling that I am a comfort or an assistance to you all. You promise me, cousin?"

"Yes," I answered, looking up in his face: "I do not know any one to whom I should go sooner than you."

"Is it really so, Grisell?" he asked. I felt my hands, which he had taken in his, tightly clasped. "Is it *really* so, Grisell?"

"It is indeed; for we have been so much together, that you are quite like an elder brother," was my answer. He dropped my hands, and walked to the window; then, hastily returning, he took one in his, and, shaking it, said,

"It is not your fault, dear Grisell. I am going now, but you will not forget what I have said: will you?"

"No:—you will see my father before you leave; or have you said good-bye?"

"Don't disturb him for me; we said all we had

to say last night," was the reply, and, kissing me in grave cousinly fashion, he departed.

It did not appear that more could be done to discover poor Alan, and we seemed tacitly to give him up as lost. Only my mother, during the hard and bitter winter that succeeded his flight, would occasionally refer to him, saying, "Oh! where is my boy, this wretched night! What sufferings he may be undergoing, while we are all assembled round the warm fire! Oh! Alan, Alan!"

From my father's lips we never heard his name; but he was often painfully present to his mind. He used to read the newspapers constantly; always looking first in those parts where accidents, cases of destitution, and casualties were recorded, and next to the police reports. But Alan's name never occurred. Months passed over, and he remained as though dead to us.

XIII.

One afternoon, during the following May, (I have cause to remember it,) while I was reading an Italian translation to Mr Langley, who had offered himself as my instructor in the language, the

parlour-door was softly opened, and a pretty face peeped in, glowing with the fresh air and the pleasure of seeing home again. I sprung up and clasped Marian in my arms, kissing her rosy cheeks over and over again.

“I knew you would be glad to see us ; so I coaxed Aunt Thomasine not to write, and here we are !” She clapped her hands, and danced into the room, when, suddenly perceiving the stranger, she blushed, made a grave little courtesy, and ran out into the passage. “Oh ! Grisell, what will that gentleman think of me ? I never saw him till I had capered close up to his chair,” said she to me, who had followed her. I told her not to mind, as I did not think he would be shocked past recovery ; and we went in search of my mother. Aunt Thomasine had found her before us, and was holding forth on the reasons of her unexpected visit, when we entered her room. I gave up Marian to her, and returned to the parlour and my lesson.

“Your sister and you are a pleasant contrast, Grisell : I should call you Sunshine and Shade,” remarked Mr Langley, as I took my seat. Presently my mother, Aunt Thomasine, and “Sun-

shine," came into the parlour; and I do believe it was brighter for Marian's presence. She was one of those gay, light-hearted, happy-tempered creatures, who seem to diffuse an atmosphere of love and warmth wherever they dwell. I often wondered that my father would part with her so readily: perhaps it was that he feared his indulgence, which he could not have denied to his pet, might spoil her. As it was, she had little wilful ways of her own: but they were a charm, too, I think. Mr Langley observed her: he seemed to follow her movements with curious, yet caressing eye: his grave lips relaxed into a smile whenever she addressed him; which she did once or twice in a shy way peculiar to herself, and very attractive. It pleased me to see how much he was taken by this fair, pretty child, just dawning into sweet womanhood. Some studious men like him would have passed her by as too trifling for notice. They seemed to understand each other at once; it was plain Marian's shyness would not last very long, for she knew him as well already as I did, apparently.

"What were you two doing when I came in?"

she asked, pulling Mr Langley's handsomely bound dictionary quickly across the table. *I* had always *lifted* it with reverent care. "Grisell at lessons! Oh! Grisell, have you not done with school yet?"

"No: she is a very diligent pupil; more so than you, when you are at school, I dare say," replied Mr Langley.

"*I* at school!" repeated Marian with dignity; "indeed no! Aunt Thomasine says I ought to be a finished gentlewoman at my time of life;"—(this in a confidential whisper;)"—"but I'm not: she despairs of me quite, sometimes; at others, she says she has hopes;" and she looked at us with an air of comic contrition, and shook her bright head till the curls danced like sunlight, dazzling some of our eyes more than anything had ever dazzled them before. At this instant my father came in, and she sprung towards him, throwing her arms round his neck, and half smothering him with kisses. Aunt Thomasine checked her.

"Oh! Marian, my dear, I wish you would control your impetuosity; it is too much for anything," said she, with a proper air: "Mr Langley will wonder where you have been brought up—in the

woods, from all appearance. Do sit down, and be still."

My father was summoned to join the family-council, and Marian, who liked nothing less than the restraint of silence, proposed that we should leave the elders, as she irreverently called them, and go into the garden. I willingly assented, and opening the glass-door, stepped out on the grass-plot. Marian followed, and then, as if struck by a sudden thought, she looked in again, and, addressing Mr Langley in a loud whisper, said, "Won't you come too?" I quite started: I believe I should as soon have thought of offering an invitation to Pierce Randal's portrait as to my grave, learned master; but Marian had no bump of veneration at all. To my surprise, Mr Langley looked gratified; he came out, and for the first time I saw a light flush mantling his olive cheek. Marian began to prattle, and he listened—charmed. I, who walked on the other side, got never a word: he forgot I was there. He had wearied of the Shade, and would now bask in the Sunshine. Who could wonder at it?

Before tea, Marian would go up to our room and

prank herself out in her best, though I told her that Mr Langley was no stranger but a daily visitor at our house. In her pure, white frock and 'rose-coloured knots, she looked lovely but overdressed. I said so, and persuaded her to put on her close, plain one again; saying, with a laugh, that Mr Langley ought to have eyes for no one but me. She stopped short in her operations to ask me why, and seeing my colour rise, she exclaimed: "Oh! you darling Grisell, are you going to be married to him?"

"We have been engaged some months," said I.

"And do you love him; that solemn, old scholar! Why he must be thirty if he is a day?" She had fifty questions to ask about it, some of which I answered, and some I did not: then she would take off the ring I wore and examine it, until I thought we never should get down stairs again. Hugh had to fetch us at last, the subject was so fertile in gossip.

My place at the tea-table of late had been betwixt my father and Mr Langley: Marian took it now. I could scarce tell why at the moment, but I felt a pang at being thus supplanted; especially

as neither of the two observed it, but received their lively neighbour with satisfaction. I took a seat by Aunt Thomasine without remonstrance, and she began to tell me what had brought her over to Burndale, so that I had no opportunity to dwell on my unpleasant feelings.

She was coming to settle amongst us, she said, for that now our family seemed gradually breaking up (with a glance at Mr Langley in allusion to my engagement), and she thought Marian might be wanted at home; though she was not disposed to part with her altogether. To avoid this, having heard of a pretty cottage to let, just outside the town, she had taken it, and was going into it immediately her possessions could be transported from Thorney.

While I was lending my attention to my aunt, I had observed Marian's eyes often fixed on a vacant place at the table, where poor Alan used to sit; she grew quieter, and once I saw the tears standing on her long lashes: she hastily wiped them away, lest my father should see. I knew why she felt it then, for not having been at home since his flight, she missed his merry face—it was

merry when she last saw it—opposite to her. They had been more of companions, being nearer of an age, than the rest of us. Mr Langley noticed her emotion too, and respected it. Alan was present that night, no doubt, in every mind, for there wanted but him to complete our family party.

Strange to say, I had no enjoyment of the evening. I felt dull, oppressed, as if the shadow of an approaching evil were already darkening over me and weighing me down with its leaden wings. In my sleep also, I started and awoke weeping. The vague fear pursued me thus closely.

XIV.

I can scarcely tell how the change came, but come it did. Not all at once ; gradually, as a mist rises, creeps along the earth, and slowly veils it from the sun : but I had shut my eyes to its progress, and when I opened them again the light was gone.

I do not wish to blame any one : I believe it was only too natural. It pleased me at first to see

Marian so great a favourite with Mr Langley. She took a whim into her head to learn Italian with him, so I relinquished to her the hour he had devoted to me hitherto, and found amusement in seeing her bewildered amongst difficulties that had once confounded me. She would sit with her bright eyes poring over her grammar, her lips murmuring the words, and her golden curls drooping on the page, for ten minutes with studious attention ; then she would look timidly aside to see if her master were growing impatient, and almost invariably find his gaze resting indulgently on the changeful lines of her sweet face. He had aptly named her Sunshine, for then a smile would hover round her lips, and reflect itself on his. Many a blunder did he pass over for fear of discouraging her, which he would have made me carefully correct. But why multiply these trifles, pregnant with meaning though they may have been to me then ?

This was the beginning of the change : it had many phases. I do not imagine that either suspected so early, any more than I did, where it would end. After Marian had been at home six weeks, we both went to stay a few days with Aunt

Thomasine. My father must have missed his friend just then, for he constantly found his way down to the cottage on some plea or another. I was glad to see him ; but Marian pretended that she was tired of her lessons, and would have a holiday. One morning we were together in the parlour, when he appeared at the turn of the lane down to the house.

“ Here comes the scholar ! ” cried Marian, jumping up in feigned consternation : “ hide me, somebody, hide me quick ; the enemy is upon us ! ” While she was still speaking and flying about with her pretty hair fluttering loosely on her neck, and her cheek flushed with a variable colour that rather puzzled me, Mr Langley entered, looking somewhat grave and absent, after his wont. Marian stood still with a sort of comical dismay lurking in her blue eyes, and shyly returned his greeting ; then sat down extremely quiet. This mood was too agreeable to last long. Mr Langley’s voice changed her like magic : she instantly became snappish, contradictory, and pettish. She wondered what profound study he was engaged in that brought him down to the cottage so often : she be-

lieved her aunt's garden did not present any new points of interest in its geological formation : might she inquire why he looked so serious and absorbed?

Mr Langley's face flushed, then darkened : he bent forward, and said something in a low tone, that had the effect of making Marian bridle her white neck, and smile with rather a tremulous lip. She began to reply ; then suddenly checked herself, and he went on speaking in the same earnest tone, inaudible to me where I sat. What was I to think ? I left the room quietly. About ten minutes after, I saw Mr Langley pass out through the garden gate in great heat and disorder ; he strode down the lane at a rapid pace, and was scarcely out of sight when Marian came running up stairs, exclaiming : " Oh ! Grisell, I don't envy you your bargain ! he is like an insane turtle dove ! I have put him in such a passion ! " I asked what she had said to him, but with some confusion of manner she refused to tell me. I endeavoured to repress the disquietude this caused me : I would not be a spy on my sister. Had not Mr Langley said he loved me ? Had he not asked me to be his wife, saying that his happiness was in my keeping ?

Ought I not to trust him? Was not this jealous feeling unworthy both of him and me? These and many other plausible questions did I ask myself; but the answer was always the same—"Yes: but that was before little Sunshine came home: he had not seen little Sunshine then."

XV.

I grew restless, miserable. I could not bear to remain long in one place: trifles chafed and irritated me: a wretched, devouring anxiety urged me into continual movement. We were then at home. A degree of restraint had arisen between Marian and me, which made us no longer at ease with each other. She was shy of any approach to the subject of my engagement; and we never alluded to it in any way. Her lessons were going regularly forward, but they were now prolonged to double their former length; and, I may say truly, that during the time they were together thus, they were perfectly happy. They heeded my presence no more than if I were a stone. I often thought, as

they sat there,—Marian with her wealth of golden ringlets almost touching his dark, brown locks, and sometimes wafted against his brow by a draught from the window—what a sweet picture they would make : their countenances both so beautiful, yet so contrasted.

Not a word of my suspicions had I breathed to any living soul. I may have seemed wilfully blind ; but so much hung on them that I dared not speak. What determined me, and cleared away all possibility of further self-deception, was this :—

One morning in August, the two were at their lesson as usual : my head burned with fever ; a refreshing breeze stirred amongst the trees ; so I passed out into the garden and strayed down to the steps by the water, leaving them together. I sat down with my aching brow in my hands, and stayed there for a space. I deny that it was with any intention of being a spy on them that at last I wandered back to the window : my restless spirit craved peace—even the peace of despair, such as was lying in wait for me even then. I heard their voices as I drew near without any distinct idea of what they said : I saw that the books were pushed

aside. I tried to pass, but my feet would not move: I stood and watched. Then I saw him take her unresisting into his arms and kiss her, saying in a voice that sounded to my rapt sense clear as a silver bell: "I love you, little Sunshine: I love you better than all the world!" and she hid her face against his breast, murmuring something in reply, of which the last words were, "poor Grisell."

I would hear no more. I entered the room, drew the ring which Mr Langley had given me from my finger, and laid it on the table before him without a word: then left them alone.

I see them now as they stood: Marian resting against his arm, and her gaze turned on me with a kind of wild affright; his countenance darkly flushed with mingled feelings, that I could not analyze: I, seemingly calm, but with a wild commotion at my heart half suffocating me. If I had remained there, I must have betrayed myself: with an instinct of womanly pride, that never forsook me, I hid all under an icy mask, after a time; but then, in the first agony, my heart demanded some outlet. Whither should I go? Not to any living being

could I have told the wild thoughts within me; so I wandered away to mother Nature, and into her large breast I let them well uncontrolled. Over the fields ripening for the harvest, through quiet woods I went, hoping to find rest for my soul in bodily exhaustion: I found a deadly apathy that served perhaps as well.

I did not return home, but went down to Aunt Thomasine's: I had walked so long that it was then twilight, and the old lady was sitting by her fire knitting. She looked up in amaze when I entered, and dropped her needles. "Bless the child!" she cried, "What is the matter? you are as white as a ghost!" I sat down wearily, gazing into the glowing fire, until the tears filled my eyes. Ah, what pleasant pictures I had seen there once! Aunt Thomasine let me alone for a while: then again she urged me to tell her what had happened. I did so, bearing on them as gently as I could. She was indignant at what she called Marian's cruel deception and Mr Langley's dishonourable weakness, and would have gone, in the first moment of irritation, to speak to my father; but I persuaded her, for my sake, to forbear, and reluctantly she

consented. I had an hour's quiet cry in dear Aunt Thomasine's parlour: I know not whether she had suffered herself; but it was likely, for she forced on me no untimely consolations, letting me ease my heart in my own way. I did not go home until dusk, for I did not wish to face them in the parlour: they all cheerful, and I with such a sorrow pressing me to the earth.

XVI.

Creeping slowly along the dim and ancient streets, my thoughts wandered away from myself into the past. How short a time we have to suffer, after all! In those quaint houses, whose fronts were pencilled by clear moonlight touches, how many generations had moaned through their brief hour and gone to their rest! In a few years *my* heart, which ached so *now*, would be dust also:—the little sum of my miseries would be ended. "It is not for long," I said, "and I *must* bear it: moreover, I must bear it, and be still." I pressed my hand against my bosom, as if I would check its wild throbbings and stifle its silent, bitter cry.

XVII.

After dusk, the streets of Burndale were always quiet: I might have loitered an hour on my way without meeting a dozen people. On entering Watergate, I saw the figure of a man pacing slowly backwards and forwards opposite our house. It was Mr Langley. I knew why he waited there, and it was impossible to evade him. He descried me as soon as I saw him, and coming up hastily, stopped me.

“Grisell, will you hear me?” he said, hurriedly. I bowed in token of assent: I dared not trust myself to speak. I waited for him to proceed, and yet he was silent for a minute or two; at last he continued:—“I cannot exculpate myself to you—I dare not ask your forgiveness.” He again hesitated. “May I write to you?”

“What end would it serve?” I forced myself to say; then willing to relieve him from his embarrassment, I added: “As for my forgiveness it is yours:—put me out of your memory, that is all I ask. Good-night—and good-bye.”

"Stay, Grisell, yet one moment! Your father—"

"Have you told him all?"

"Yes. He has a right to condemn *me*—but Marian —"

I would have passed on, but he again stopped me; this time laying his hand on mine. I shook it off.—What right had he to torture me thus?

"Your father has forbidden me his house: I must see Marian:—I *will* see her: Grisell, will you—*will* you intercede for us?" I again made an attempt to leave him; his manner was excited and wild: it was impossible to discern anything in him of the grave scholar, such as I had known him hitherto: he seemed quite changed in every respect. This time he suffered me to go, saying, "Grisell, *will* you?"

Alas! I had loved him more than myself, for I turned to reply. "Mr Langley, I will do what you ask: if I fail, blame me not." He thanked me warmly, and let me go.

I knew then that he had *never loved me*. My quiet ways had suited him, perhaps; but his man's heart had not glowed for me with the passionate tenderness that stirred in it now. It was a mortifying

conclusion, but a true one ; and I repeated it over to myself again and again. I like a stern truth better than a fair falsity.

XVIII.

When I entered the house, my father called me into his closet, and in a few stern, contemptuous sentences, repeated to me the substance of what he had said to Mr Langley. " While I live, his shadow shall never darken my door again," he added, in conclusion. I saw that it was not the moment to intercede for them, as he was too indignant to listen to me or any one. I made my escape to my room : Marian shared it with me, and I found her sitting there in the dark. I took off my out-door things, and sat down on the bed to rest : presently she came to me weeping, and knelt down before me : she took my hands and kissed them. I felt the hot tears as they fell, myself unmoved : her sobs woke a long, wailing echo in my heart, that deadened all other sensations.

" Oh, Grisell ! speak to me : say you don't quite

hate me," she gasped. I loosened one of my hands and stroked down her hair gently.

"What has happened shall make no division between us, Marian," I said : but it was in a hard, forced tone, and it only made her cry the more. It was here that I had to put the strongest restraint upon myself—here, where naturally I should have sought for consolation. I could not let *her* see my heart, and therefore I had to wear an apathetic coldness that might pass with her for anger. I hope, however, she did not so far mistake me : further explanation we never had.

My mother held me long in her arms that night when she came in to see us : I would gladly have wept on that kindly bosom ; but Marian was there, and I choked back my tears into their aching source and was still. On the morrow and afterwards, I compelled myself to go about my household duties as usual : I would not pause to think. I saw Marian take possession of Mr Langley's books, and hide them away out of everybody's sight but her own, without remark : she felt it her right now, and I was not surprised to see how steadily she supported my father's cold displeasure and my mother's

silent disapproval. I suppose she had that in her heart which made her independent of other love : I remembered the time when such feelings had raised *me* above the reach of trouble also.

Notwithstanding my promise to Mr Langley, it was many days before I could bring myself to renew the subject with my father ; and, when I did so, it was utterly without avail : he had taken his resolution and would abide by it. Yet I pleaded for them earnestly : I could not bear to see the roses fading on Marian's cheeks, and her eyes dimmed by long night-weepings. She thought, too, that it rested but with me to soften our father's displeasure : very difficult was it to persuade her that I had tried and failed. Affectionate as she was, her quick temper resented the continued coldness with which our parents treated her. If she crept into my father's arms, he sternly put her thence without caress ; and my mother assumed a repulsive manner, to her quite unnatural. Marian flew to me.

"How can I live thus?" she would exclaim, passionately : "nobody loves me—nobody but Mr Langley." I urged her to be patient ; saying, that

in time, perhaps, they would relent, and she might be happy : then she reproached me ; but I bore it silently, knowing what she suffered, and therefore compassionating her. She was such a child yet—barely sixteen—and this was the first cross she had met with. If it had rested with me then, she should have had her heart's desire, and I would have carried my grave face elsewhere, until she had gone to her new home : but it did not. Her attachment was characterized as a whim, a wayward fancy, that would soon wear itself out : even if it did not, Mr Langley was not the man to whom her happiness could be safely committed. I listened to these opinions, though I did not agree with them, and watched for an opportunity to plead their cause with better chance of success.

On my fifteenth birthday, Aunt Thomasine had presented me with a book of blank paper, prettily bound in purple morocco, and clasped with a little silver lock, the key of which she admonished me to wear attached to my watch-chain, lest any one should be tempted to steal my thoughts. I remember sitting with the volume in my hand, after she had left me, wondering what I should record there—

in. Ought I to set down my careless words, which were many, and my idle thoughts, which were more; or should I reserve it for the great events and experiences which life and the future *must* have in store for me? At first I entered a few trivial domestic occurrences, but speedily tiring of the exercise, I folded it carefully up, and laid it by to wait more stirring times. For several eventless years it was forgotten. Aunt Thomasine never inquired about it, and it did not suit me to refresh her memory. Now, however, I drew it tenderly forth from its hiding-place, and made it my friend, my confidant, my consoler. It did me good to bring my feelings to its stern, impartial judgment: to see my weakness set down there, in ineffaceable characters, made me loathe, and helped me to conquer it.

Whose happiness did I covet? My little sister's! Had I a right to hate her because another found her more loveable than me? Was she not in all respects more likely to win, to attract? This jealousy was mean, contemptible, cruel: I would put it away from me. I can read these brief, stormy entries now with a smile, almost: the ink itself is

not more faded than the wild passions that gave them utterance. I even wonder how they ever came to be written, and ask myself incredulously : " Did I ever feel this ? " Strange as it seems now, it was only too real then.

Marian was beautiful : once I envied her this all-powerful gift, and felt angry that nature had not dowered me with a form as pliant and a face as fair : my heart overflowed with resentful bitterness ; and there, in the little silver-clasped book, the record stands to reproach me, even yet. Then, again, I find long extracts in verse and prose, comments on books, dry as dust to me, which I forced myself to study, that, if it were possible, I might wean my mind from the deadly thralldom that choked it up. At the foot of one of these tasteless exercises, I find it written ; " Oh ! how my heart aches ! " That was doubtless the pith of the matter ; for it recurs more than once.

The history of one dark hour is like a wicked blot on the page ; yet would not the tale be complete without it : it tells of how I sat one sunny afternoon on the garden steps by the river, watching the water rippling past my feet ; wild, evil thoughts

surging through my brain and prompting me to revenge myself on them both by dying there: they would not marry surely with such a guilty shadow between them. I have often been tempted to tear out this leaf, but something has always stayed my hand. It is but just to let the evil and the little good there may be go together, even in this poor diary, which was meant for no eye but my own:—perhaps there are not many lives which have escaped altogether from as dark and hopeless an hour as this.

But after it comes a change: this was the crisis. The wound-fever slackens gradually, and the tide of life flows on again; tamer, deeper, less clear, and for a while quite silent. Then again a relapse:—what deadly disease passes without one, or even more? It is well if it leave no cicatrice behind it as enduring as existence itself.

My diary, begun thus in necessity, I have continued at intervals ever since, and from it I extract this story of our family and of my own inner and outer life. Let me now return to the narrative of those dark days, which may not be without their lesson.

XIX.

One burning September day, I went up the valley to the woods near Thorney. It had become habitual to me now to take long solitary walks : I had no other chance of avoiding Marian, and it was a necessity to me to be alone sometimes. The reapers were busy with the harvest in the corn-fields : the deep, uniform green of the trees stood out against the sky in dark, moveless masses : the distance was all veiled in a mist of heat. Leaving the dusty roads, I entered the meadows, and, heedless of the glaring sun, went steadily up the hills until I gained the cool shadow of the woods, where I intended to rest.

I had brought out with me a book, but I read not a line : I sat drearily watching the shadows cast by the clouds as they crept over the sky, gathering heavily on the ridge of the moors. Pen-hill looked black, and light gray vapours fluttered like rent garments down its side : the river lay calm and glassy amongst the fields, and there

seemed an oppressive thundery air brooding all over the vale. Gradually, as I watched, there came drifting up over the sky a small lurid cloud: it seemed to settle over Burndale: in its track followed others of the same hue, and, gathering to its mass, they slowly overspread the blue and shut out the sun. Then there rushed a low muttering wind up the vale: the trees swayed to its power, and hoarse peals of distant thunder rattled and echoed amongst the hills. I used to be afraid of the lightning: now I stayed and watched it playing over the moors and running along the crest of Penhill, without a thought but of its sublime beauty. The storm was brief as it was violent; but when the clouds on the horizon broke and dispersed, a mass still hung like a lurid pall above Burndale.

The rain fell heavily, and therefore, instead of returning by the way I had come, I struck into the high road near the old hall at Thorney, and prepared to make the best of my way home; hoping to be overtaken by some chance conveyance that would carry me all or part of the way. No such good fortune was in store for me, however, and when I arrived at Aunt Thomasine's, whose cottage

lay at the end of the suburb on the Thorney road, to use one of her favourite expressions, I looked "lost." She insisted on my staying all night, and I the more readily consented, because Hugh came down to see if I was there, and could set them at ease about me at home. I had seen very little of my aunt lately, and she had now some news that surprised me.

"I have had your father here this afternoon, Grisell," she began: "he wishes me to go from home and take away Marian for a change: he thinks it will be the easiest way to detach her from Mr Langley; and I agree with him. What do you say?"

"That it is a vain precaution," was my reply. "I wish my father would see what is the truth, and not be blinded by his resentment. I think Marian would be very happy as Mr Langley's wife: you know, Aunt Thomasine, had he seen her first, he would never have thought of me—that is an impossibility: he really *loves* her."

"I don't know what you young people call love now-a-days," said Aunt Thomasine: "I thought he *loved* you?"

"So did I once—but never mind me: it is of

Marian I want to speak. You have not seen her for weeks, have you?"

"No, indeed! the naughty little thing knows better than to come near me: she knows very well what a reception she would get if she did. I consider that you have been far too tame under it, Grisell: still I don't know what good quarrelling would do. Mr Langley is not worth it: I have not patience with men who are won by every pretty face they see."

"If you saw Marian, you would pity her: she is miserable." Aunt Thomasine tried to say that she deserved it; but she did not succeed in imparting an air of sincerity to her words, for Marian had ever been her darling, and her anxious affection was aroused when she heard of her being pale and suffering. Still she was not willing that her intimacy with Mr Langley should continue, and was of opinion that change of air should be tried first.

We heard the next morning that a virulent fever had made its appearance in Burndale, and Aunt Thomasine, fearing that Marian, in her depressed state, might be liable to take it, hurried her off that very day to the seaside. My sister raised not the

slightest objection against going: indeed she seemed to revive at the idea, and left us more cheerful than she had been since the discovery of her attachment.

XX.

They were absent six weeks. At the end of that time Aunt Thomasine wrote us word that the sea-winds were too cold for her, and that Marian was so much improved we should scarcely recognise her.

It was candle-light when they arrived, and both my parents were eager to receive Marian with all their former love. But in her manner there was a certain hurry and confusion, which I had never remarked before: she seemed anxious to escape from their questions and observations. Having kissed them hastily, she called to me to go up stairs with her.

We went; and I offered to help her to undress, but she gently repulsed me, and with trembling hands unloosed her bonnet and cloak. I watched for the marvellous change we had been led to ex-

pect. She did indeed look better, but her excessive agitation puzzled me. I pretended not to observe it; for she seemed uneasy under my scrutiny, and tried to talk of indifferent matters.

"How is the fever going on?" she asked me, with an assumption of carelessness that could not conceal her anxiety. I replied that it was abating, that we only heard of rare cases, and that no one we knew had suffered by it. This satisfied her apparently.

"You may leave me, Grisell: I shall not go down stairs any more to-night, I am so tired and sleepy," said she wearily; and seeing that she really wished to be alone, I went.

I heard them talking earnestly in the parlour as I proceeded towards it, but when I entered a dead silence fell.

"What were you speaking of?" I asked.

After a pause of a minute, Aunt Thomasine said, "What all the town is talking about—the fever."

"Yes, it has been very bad." A sudden presentiment struck me, and I demanded, "Has any friend of ours taken it?"

My father said, "No;" and then correcting him-

self, added, "Mr Langley does not come under that denomination now." So I learnt that Mr Langley had taken the fever. I thought I ought to tell Marian; but as she was asleep when I returned to my room, I gladly deferred it till the morning. Several times during the night I heard her murmuring his name in her dreams, which were very restless and troubled; and towards dawn I awoke her, she was weeping so bitterly.

"What ails you, Marian, darling?" I asked. She made no reply, but went on moaning. I feared she was ill, and begged her to speak.

"Oh! Grisell, I know—I *feel*—something has happened to Mr Langley," she said: "how are we to get to know about him?" Cautiously I repeated to her what I had heard. She sprang up, and stared at me in affright, half incredulous for an instant, then exclaimed, "And I am here! I ought to be with him! Grisell, let me go!"—(for I had thrown my arms round her,)—"let me go! I have a right to be with him."

I did not know what she meant: I thought she was light-headed, and held her still.

"Grisell, don't be cruel—don't be hard! let me go!" she pleaded.

"My darling, you must not."

"I *must*, Grisell.—I am his *wife*: I have been his wife a month. We were married when I was away with Aunt Thomasine;" and she showed me a wedding-ring, suspended by a narrow black ribbon round her neck.

I had nothing to say, and I let her go.

"I was afraid of my father, and I prevailed on Harry to let me come home to try to persuade him once more," she said. "Help me, Grisell: help me to get dressed, that I may go to him at once."

I asked no questions, but gave her the assistance she wanted. She spoke on: "I would not have done it, sister, but I was over-persuaded. You must tell my father, and try to soften him: perhaps he will feel for me now:—and my mother! It was wrong of me—I know it was wrong,—but I could not bear their harshness; and when he urged me to put it out of their power to separate us, I consented, on condition that he would let me return home, and keep it secret for a few months, in the hope that they would change. And now, oh, Grisell! I am very miserable. Perhaps God may punish my disobedience: but Harry is more to me now, and dearer than any one, and go I must."

"Yes," said I; "being his wife, your place is with him: especially now when he is ill." Poor little Sunshine! my heart ached for her.

It was still very early morning: I let her out of the house myself, and watched her up to Mr Langley's door. She was admitted without parley: I afterwards learnt that the female servant who lived with him had been a witness of her master's marriage.

It was now my task to tell this unlooked-for news to my father. This I did without circumlocution, as soon as he came down; considering the straightforward plan the best. He received it without a syllable of comment, in a stern silence. Later in the day, he told me that he would not forbid me or my mother to see the child, as he called her, but for himself he would never speak to her again. My mother wept, and prayed him to relent; but he left us, and shut himself up in his closet: we saw him no more throughout that day. How his proud heart must have ached under this second bereavement—of his darling, too!

In the evening my mother went out to see Marian, and if possible to induce her to resign the care

of Mr Langley to a nurse ; but she came back without effecting this, and bringing a message to say that my sister wished to have me with her. Aunt Thomasine thought I ought not to go, on account of infection ; but as I had no fear for myself, and my father told me to follow my own judgment, I went. The servant, Jane, showed me into a gloomy parlour, saying she would fetch Mrs Langley, who was in her master's room. It sounded strange to hear Marian spoken of thus ; and the woman did it so naturally, as if she was accustomed to the sound. Soon my sister appeared. I was astonished to find her quite calm and self-possessed. I had expected floods of tears and pitiable lamentations. The best strength of her character was manifesting itself already : all her childishness had vanished.

“ The doctor is up-stairs with Harry,” said she gravely : “ he is quieter than he was ; but, Grisell, though he keeps asking for little Sunshine, he does not recognise me.” Her lip quivered, but she conquered the rising emotion. “ It was selfish in me sending for you ; but I know you are not timid, and I thought you would not object to come sometimes.” I assured her I was glad to be of any service.

I remained there until my sister's husband was out of danger : then I returned home again. My father never once made an inquiry respecting either of them, but suffered me to go backwards and forwards without remark.

One day, after I had been talking to Marian some time, she told me they were going to leave Burndale : the doctor thought a warmer climate requisite for Mr Langley in his enfeebled state of health. " I must see my father before I go," she added : " I must have his forgiveness : and you, Grisell—you must see Harry, and part friends. Who knows whether we shall ever meet again ?"

This was Saturday. The next day Mr Langley and Marian were in their place at church, side by side. My father steadily averted his eyes. There was a strange clergyman in the pulpit that day ; he preached well and forcibly, taking for his text these words : " Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him : but weep sore for him that goeth away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country : " with reference to the severe visitation which the town had had from the fever.

I looked to where my sister sat : her face was

very pale and downcast. As for my mother, the tears trickled fast down her cheeks. She knew of their projects ; my father had not yet been told : these remarkable words did not therefore touch him as they did us.

XXI.

The morrow was the first day of Burndale fair. Hitherto it had been the custom to invite our country friends to meet for dinner and tea at our house, but this year they all went elsewhere ; and in the afternoon I found myself sitting quite alone in my chamber. I had worked busily all the morning, and only fatigue of body, and lack of anything more to do, had at last driven me to what had once been my favourite retreat : namely, the low, lattice-paned bow-window, which overhung the street, and gave me a view up and down it to the bridge at one end and the High Church at the other. It was not much there was to be seen from it any time ; but directly opposite was a dead-wall enclosing a garden, and this garden, with its fine shady trees, I loved to look upon. When I sat down

that afternoon, my heart was dull and heavy : it had been one of my gloomy days, and I had suffered much. Soon, however, my thoughts were called away from myself to misery far greater than my own.

There were two beggars, a man and a woman, resting on the pavement under the garden-wall. They had been there half the day, and though the night was drawing in they made no sign of movement. They had nowhere to go ; that was evident. They looked as if they meant to stay there until morning, and as if their couch was nothing new either for quality or position. They were of those wretched waifs and strays of humanity that always hang on the skirts of country merry-makings. I speculated on their ages : the man was sixty at least ; the woman young enough to be his daughter. Whatever were their relationship to each other, there they crouched, children of dire poverty, and misery undeniable ; teaching me a strong lesson in my repining. With those two pitiable objects before my eyes, respectable judicious philanthropy might have preached to me in vain on the evil effects of relieving street-beggars : all that Adversity has of most squalid and most

sórdid, she had conferred on these her liege subjects.

It was an October evening, with a keen frostiness in the air, and a stinging east wind, which lay in wait at the street-corners and made merry in a flippant, ghastly way with the poor wretches' rags. I wondered how far they had travelled since the sun arose : by what crimsoned hedge-rows, by what full brooks, their weary feet had paced. Where had they crept for shelter during the heavy rain that fell about noonday ? or were they out in it all, drenched to the purple skin ? I wondered whether their ears had been gladdened by any voice of kindness, or whether they had been conscious of pitying glances cast upon them as they passed. I wondered where their childhood had been spent, or whether they had ever had any childhood. They looked as if life had been only one long fight with famine. I wondered whence they came, what they had gone through, and whither they were going. Most of all, I wondered what these people felt, and what they thought of life and the world. They have souls : therefore they *must* think. What is it all about ?

. Do they love ? It seemed so. That wretched

old man, with beard of a week's growth, and rheumatism-crippled limbs, was supported against the woman's shoulder. Nothing but natural affection could have borne that ghastly burden: yet she testified no disgust; instead she made a cushion of her fragment of a shawl, and laid it on her shoulder that its bony hardness might be less felt by that poor gray head; and while he slept she kept anxious watch up and down the street.

The last slanting ray of crimson sun faded from the steep gable-roofs of the old houses, and from the church-tower: the wind had an aggravating whistle and vivacity, which it appeared to increase purposely as it came into the neighbourhood of the beggars. They could not resist it, poor souls! and the blast, like some other things in this world, seemed to take a perverse delight in bullying the helpless. What was my suffering to theirs? God help them!

While I watched, there came down the street two comely Levites: I knew them both; they were excellent family men, highly respectable, and well to do in the world. I felt glad, thinking that these poor pilgrims would get substantial help at last. Not so: these priests were of those who

"passed by on the other side." That miserable half-clad woman knew human nature better than I did : she stretched forth no hand, lifted no eye, preferred no petition : not from any rich man's gift were those parched lips to be fed that night.

Then I kept a look-out for the good Samaritan, making sure that he would come ere long. His *deed* came. A woman scantily dressed, with a baby in her arms, paused opposite the pair, spoke to them, and from her own purse, but one degree better plenished than their own, dropt a coin into the female's hand, then went on her way : doubtless a blessing followed her,—the blessing of her who "hath done what she could." A few moments later Mr Langley's Jane came along the pavement : she also added her mite, and the woman, who had risen to her feet, followed her with earnest thanks. Presently she came back with bread, some of which she gave to the old man, who ate it eagerly. Mr Langley devoted, as I knew, a third of his income, whatever that might be, to charitable purposes.

"They may be thieves, rogues, or worse, who beg of me ; but I make it a rule never to turn the hungry from my door unfed," he had one day re-

plied, when my father remarked on his indiscriminate almsgiving as more productive of evil than good. I remember liking the reason he alleged for this: "Nine may be worthless vagabonds, but the tenth may be some sorely stricken soul, to whom a deed of kindness may be a renewal of life: should I then withhold it?"

It was almost dark now, so when Jane had gone back home I closed the curtains, feeling as I did so happier and calmer than I had done for many months. Still I thought of these poor houseless wretches all the evening after. On the morrow, would they tramp on the road again?—would they come to some other city street and rest?—would they lie down in a field, a wood, or some charitable soul's barn?—I had no means of knowing; but to all my other wonderings that had gone before I added yet another: I wondered how such people die!—Can anybody tell me?

XXII

On entering the parlour, I found my father sitting gloomily over a book, and my mother sewing,

while Hugh pored sedulously over his Euclid. They made way for me to approach the fire, and I sat down on a low stool at my mother's feet. Her hand passed caressingly over my head, caused me to look up, and I saw that she had been weeping. I had been selfish in my sorrow :—alas ! hers had been perhaps as deep. It was time to amend, and I instantly resolved to begin.

She liked being read to aloud, for her sight was weak ; yet for months had I neglected giving her this amusement. My own pleasure in books was gone : it was difficult to get away from the chapter of life that I had conned so recently. Much rather would I have sat dreaming on ; but conscience said, “ Do the right ! ” and I asked my mother if I should read to her. Her grateful reply was worse than a reproach to me. Neglected trifles in kindness sometimes amount to great wrongs : I had forgotten this.

From the shelf I reached down her favourite book : it was an old one, and had been read through often ; still she preferred it to any other but her Bible. It was the “ Life of Colonel Hutchison,” written by his wife. When I began, my father

laid his volume aside and listened. The book was not closed till supper-time : it did us all good.

“ It is like a shadow of the old times come back, Grisell,” said my father : he called me to him and kissed me. The moment was propitious : I took courage and whispered Marian’s name to him : my mother also added her voice of entreaty.

“ Let it rest, wife,” he said with unsteady voice ; “ let it rest. How can I give the hand of amity to the man who has stolen my child ?—and Marian cannot be divided, even in that, from her husband. Poor helpless little thing ! ”

He said afterwards that Mr Langley was a man of strong passions and fine intellect, but no principle, and that he feared Marian would live to repent her rash marriage very sorely ; but he hoped not—he prayed God not ! We knew he was relenting when he spoke thus, and took hope, for he made no answer when we told him that they were going very soon to leave England, and what for ; but his gloomy eye softened visibly : there was much tenderness under his rough exterior.

Half an hour later in the evening, we were sitting round the fire, all rather sad at heart, when the

parlour door opened, and Marian entered alone. She went up to my father without hesitation, and holding out her hands, said: "Father, bid God bless me once more, before I leave you all."

He looked up in her agitated face: "Marian, my child!" he exclaimed, surprised into natural feeling by the suddenness of her appearance, when no doubt his heart was yearning towards her. He kissed her, much moved. He let her rest her bright head on his breast, where it had rested so often, before the shadow came which made her now so still and wan. With her cheek against his, she whispered something to him in her old winning way: a frown darkened his brow for a moment; but for a moment only. He glanced at me:—"Grisell, Mr Langley is outside," he said.

"Let him come in," was my reply. Marian sprang to the door and brought in her husband amongst us

We gathered round the tea-table once more, and for the last time altogether.

On the morrow little Sunshine and Mr Langley left Burndale. It was a comfort to us afterwards to recollect that we did not part unreconciled, when

that came between us which puts forgiveness out of our reach, and makes repentance and regret in vain.

XXIII.

Our home was no longer the same after this second separation. The two gayest were gone from amongst us. I was become sad from experience, and Hugh was grave by nature. Aunt Thomasine used continually to remind him that he was the hope of the family, and that she expected great things from him. It was not necessary to put ambitious thoughts into his head, for he was aspiring enough already : to me occasionally, in moments of confidence, he would tell his schemes ; but for the most part he kept them silently brooding in his own mind, gathering strength for the future. At this time all his ambition was to be a learned, wise, good man, a great scholar : in short, like Pierce Randal, in my aunt's tradition. Circumstances, however, afterwards gave a different bent to his inclinations.

My mother, who was always of a frail constitu-

tion, had been declining ever since Alan's disappearance. She now sunk very rapidly, and a few days before Christmas she died. My father survived her barely three months. I will not dwell on the details of this melancholy period. It came and passed as our times of natural trouble do : with poignant sorrow—calm regret—then consolation and half forgetfulness.

The plans for Hugh's education were necessarily overthrown. It was not likely that much provision could have been made for us with the means my father had possessed to maintain his family. My brother was now old enough to understand this. Aunt Thomasine took upon herself to explain it to him ; he himself gave her a good opening one evening about a month after my father's death.

"The principal estates of the Randals were in Richmondshire," said he : "do you know who holds them now, aunt?" He had got the old history again.

"Mr Nevil has Thorney ; as for the others, they have been divided and subdivided, and have changed hands over and over again, until I cannot recollect their possessors ;" replied the old lady.

There was a considerable pause before Hugh again spoke, and when he did, it was with a degree of hesitation quite unusual to him.

"Aunt Thomasine, is it decided yet what I am to be?" he asked.

She shook her head and sighed. "The matter is exactly where it was; Mr Flinte cannot make up his mind either one way or the other. He knows he ought to do something for you, being of our kin, and a very rich man; but he wishes to escape from the necessity, if he can do so without exciting comment. The fear of the world, Hugh, stands some men in lieu of a conscience."

This Mr Flinte was our mother's only brother, whom my poor father had left in charge of his affairs—an office anything but pleasant to him, judging from the way in which he received it.

Hugh made no response to Aunt Thomasine's moral observation, but gazed thoughtfully into the fire, seeing who knows what towering castles in the future.

"It is high time something were decided on—you will be fourteen in May," continued my aunt. "Fifteen," interrupted Hugh.

"Fifteen! to be sure; so you will!—How time

flies !—Well, nephew, Grisell and I should both like you to be one of the learned professions ; but without Mr Flinte comes forward handsomely, you know that is impossible, my boy.” Aunt Thomasine spoke softly, as if hoping to mitigate thereby the disappointment she imagined Hugh would feel.

“ I do not wish to follow any of the learned professions. Mr Flinte might find me a situation in a merchant’s office ; or he might give me one in his own : that would not cost him much, surely,” said my brother.

I thought this a good idea, and said so.

“ But have you a taste that way ? A year ago your inclination was so very different,” interposed my aunt.

“ I should prefer it to anything that could be done for me,” was the brief reply.

“ A merchant’s clerk !—and you may never, perhaps, be more all your life !” exclaimed the old lady regretfully.

A quiet, meaning smile overspread Hugh’s countenance. “ Give me an opening, and trust me to make a way for myself : I wish for no higher or fairer start,” said he.

I gave him a glance of affectionate approval. I

relished his energy and decision—his promptitude and fearlessness : there was not much risk that he would make wreck of what he undertook.

“ Mr Flinte is a disagreeable man to deal with—a very hard man indeed ;” suggested Aunt Thomasine, whose whim it was to raise objections apparently.

“ That will not much affect me : I am tolerably tough myself,” was the response.

“ Not as Mr Flinte is, Hugh, I hope and pray ! I would rather you should remain a poor man all your days than grow rich on other people’s distress and ruin. Keep the good Miss Grisell Randal’s saying in your memory, my boy : ‘ Honour before all the world ! ’ ”

Aunt Thomasine’s usually sharp eyes filled as she spoke thus earnestly. Hugh kept silence, thinking his own thoughts. Rather vague and visionary no doubt these thoughts were, yet tinged with an earnestness of purpose such as pervades most of life’s young dreams. Presently he moved out of the circle of the firelight and retreated to the upper end of the room, while my aunt and I carried on the discussion of his sensible plan.

Mr Flinte was written to immediately, and made acquainted with Hugh's wish. He vouchsafed no reply to our letter ; but on the following Sunday, late at night, there came a tremendous peal at the front-door bell, which heralded a visit from him in person.

" I always travel on Sunday, madam," said the visitor's gruff voice, in explanation of his untimely visit : " yes, it saves time, and time is our best estate—a-hem ! "

Aunt Thomasine's treble chimed in, in tones of welcome, and Mr Flinte shook hands with us all round in a stiff patronizing way, which impressed us with a due sense of his immense superiority and importance. He was an eminently respectable man in appearance ; large, stout, bald, and with a florid complexion, and keen, gray eyes that looked out from beneath his strongly marked brows, as if they defied anybody to deceive him, let their wiliness be what it might. It was not a countenance calculated to create a bad impression : I was agreeably surprised, and began to think the stories I had heard of his unfeeling disposition were exaggerated.

Aunt Thomasine rang the bell for supper, and

went out to see after it herself, while our visitor ensconced himself in my father's easy-chair, and composed himself with an air of unimpeachable respectability, such as I never saw surpassed, or even equalled, with his feet extended across the rug, and his comfortable chin in the air. He did not deign to address Hugh or me in Aunt Thomasine's absence ; but when she returned, he opened his business by repeating his brilliant and novel observation on Sunday travelling : to which none of us responded, for the Sabbath was kept as a day of rest amongst us.

" Well, young sir, it is on' your account I am here," he said, turning his shrewd glance on Hugh : " what can you do ? I am afraid you are not worth much ; but I intend to do something for you, if you deserve it : "—he might have added, " but as little as I possibly can." Aunt Thomasine evidently felt nettled at the way in which her favourite was addressed ; especially as it seemed to reflect on his dead father's care.

" He has had every advantage that could be afforded him in a quiet, country town like Burndale," said she stiffly. " I do not expect that you will

find him deficient in any of the usual attainments of his age, but rather the contrary. What say you, Grisell ?”

“ That Mr Flinte had better hear Hugh speak for himself, and see Dr Larke to-morrow, who will give a candid, and I am sure highly favourable account of my brother,” I replied with precision.

“ My dear ladies, what you call favourable, I may consider objectionable,” said Mr Flinte. “ It is no merit in my eyes that a boy’s head is full of Latin and Greek : an ounce of common sense goes further than all the book learning in Christendom.”

“ Hugh, ring the bell !” briefly interposed Aunt Thomasine, who, from her deepening complexion, was fast getting very angry.

The servant appeared. “ Bring supper, quick ;” was the order sharply delivered. Hugh was on thorns ; he dreaded an explosion which would not be likely to advance his cause much with our dogmatical relative.

“ Can he cast accounts ?—Can he write a legible hand ?—that is what I want to know,” continued Mr Flinte, folding his white hands over his waistcoat.

"Yes, he can : and he has, moreover, habits of diligence and perseverance such as you will not find in five boys in a hundred," snapped my aunt defiantly : "I ought to know him pretty well, for I have seen him every year since he came into the world, and I have made character my study ; you have not seen him till to-night."

Mr Flinte passed the insinuation by. "Still, my good lady, you will excuse me if I think it probable that he may be wanting in many essential points, such as a man like myself—a man of the world, and a man of business, ma'am—is not apt to consider as of small moment," he said.

Aunt Thomasine put a strong restraint on herself and maintained a frigid silence, looking more dignified and uncompromising than usual. Mr Flinte had touched her most sensitive point : as the oracle of the family, her judgment had never been doubted before, and yet this strange person coolly set it at nought. She longed to resent the affront, and would have done so, but Hugh telegraphed across to her a deprecating glance, and she forbore. With all but him, our visitor's remarks and innuendoes had quite counteracted the favourable

impression that his dulcet, benignant appearance had at first made. Miss Thomasine presided at the supper-table with a distraite, formal air, which she well knew how to assume when she found herself in uncongenial society, and dropped each needful word from her lips like a chilly little hailstone. This frigidity took no effect, however, on Mr Flinte's impenetrable cuticle. He addressed himself to Hugh.

"Now, young sir, I should like to hear you say something to the purpose on your own behalf," said he: "If you will make known your wishes and capabilities, I will take the night to think them over, and give you my decision as to what I am able and willing to do for you in the morning."

Nothing daunted by this exordium, Hugh replied, with a curtness equal to Mr Flinte's own:

"I should prefer before all things a situation in a merchant's office—your own if you are willing."

"That is something like business, nephew: always come to the point at once: don't keep edging and fencing round a question for a quarter of an hour. I hate a long preamble, or anything else that consumes time uselessly. You'll bear in mind

what I said about its being our best estate: it yields a good income if diligently worked; it is barren ground to none but the slothful—a-hem!”

We all murmured a mild assent. The clock here struck eleven. Aunt Thomasine disguised a yawn, and Mr Flinte rose to go, saying, that he had left his carpet-bag at the inn, and would see us again in the morning. It was a favourite remark of this gentleman's, that he could afford to dispense with people's good opinion; and on this occasion he certainly did so, for when he had retired Aunt Thomasine handled his character by no means tenderly.

“I can't endure him, with his moral sentences and his sneer,” said she warmly: “I am half-disposed to reject his assistance for you. He is a tyrant, I am sure. All we have heard about him is undoubtedly true.”

“If he will take me, I'll go,” replied my brother: “He can serve me better than any one we know; and as for his sarcasms and tyranny, I do not value them a rush! We can't expect to walk on velvet all our lives: we must come to the thorny roads in time.”

"I declare, Hugh, you have caught one of his tricks already; you are beginning to moralize!" exclaimed the old lady with affected horror. "Pray don't: the next thing you will begin to look sleek and respectable:—perhaps even bald—the very climax of respectability!"—then, more graciously, she added: "you know the right, my boy, and I hope you will do it: you have plenty of perseverance—unlike poor Alan."

"He was a good fellow, was Alan," said Hugh feelingly.

"Ah! yes, so he was after his fashion: always longing to do something kind, but impracticable. It is better to work a little than to wish much," returned Aunt Thomasine. I put up a warning finger.—"Mr Flinte again!—he has infected you too, aunt," I exclaimed.

We then separated for the night, all anxious to know what the cogitations of our visitor would produce next morning.

XXIV.

We had not, perhaps, a right to expect very much from Mr Flinte; but I will not deny that we were both surprised and disappointed at the results of his night's meditations, although he made them known to us with an air of generosity and magnificence, calculated to call forth our warmest gratitude. He would take Hugh into his office without any premium: that was the extent of his benevolence. For three years he would earn no salary whatever; at the end of that time a hope was held out to us that he should receive thirty or forty annual pounds, according to his deserts.

Aunt Thomasine looked aghast. I saw she was about to demand, with more asperity than policy, how in the mean time he was to be clothed and fed; so I took the reply to myself, thanked our uncle, and said that Hugh should be in readiness to follow him to town in a few days. As this was the first time I had addressed myself to our relative directly, he seemed amazed, and eyed me from

head to foot, with a glance that did not extinguish me as it ought to have done. Seeing that I supported it unflinchingly, he condescended to include me in the conversation : no longer turning to Aunt Thomasine as the sole mistress and head of the family. He asked if we had thought where the boy must live.

“ I should not like to leave Burndale at my time of life,” murmured my aunt softly.

Perceiving that there was some difficulty about the minor arrangements, Mr Flinte relieved us from his presence, and himself from the embarrassment of hearing of our straits at the same time. His last words were, that he should consider the thing settled.

“ Settled !” ejaculated Aunt Thomasine : “ settled with a vengeance !—Is the boy a chameleon—can he live on air ?”

“ Now, Hugh,” said I, “ take your cap and go to Dr Larke ; he is wishful to know what his pet pupil is to be.” I hurried him off that he might not hear my aunt’s tragical lamentations, and the pecuniary discussions that it was necessary to have.

“ What have you got to propose, Grisell ?” asked

my aunt. "You look perfectly contented with that old—I don't know what to call him's arrangements."

"I shall go to London with Hugh, assuredly. You have forgotten my god-mother Lee's legacy:—we shall live on that," said I gravely.

"Why, child, the interest won't keep you in bread and salt!" cried the old lady, looking at me as if she thought I had taken leave of my senses.

"But the principal will."

"And what is to become of you when it is gone?"

"Oh! let the future take care of itself!—That is clearly my duty, and my work: I must not neglect it from any selfish fear of the time to come."

"I cannot help you."

"There is no need that you should: we shall have sufficient, and more than sufficient, for the next three or four years. And, aunt, you must not tell Hugh: I would rather he did not know of this arrangement."

She gave me the promise I required; and, though she could not help indulging in a few dolorous anticipations of our future, on the whole she was

satisfied : perhaps, the more easily, because no other feasible plan suggested itself.

XXV.

I am one of those persons who become attached to places : the dumb witnesses of their glad or sorrowful experiences. I think no other motive less powerful than that which now urged me, could have induced me to leave my old home when I did. I remember feeling hurt at Hugh's indifference to the past and excitement for the future, as if they were not quite natural at his age ; but I kept all my fancies to myself.

It was a fine summer day when we quitted Burndale, and the valley was in all its beauty : my eyes grew dim more than once as we passed familiar scenes. Thorney Hall was shut up during the absence of the family in town. Hugh called my attention to it, and whispered—"Grisell, if there should ever be a Randal of Thorney again."

"Dreams, brother Hugh, dreams : " answered I, with a tearful smile. He was silent after that, but

I saw by the firm set of his lips, his clear eyes, and raised colour, that he was revolving remote possibilities in that far-seeing mind of his.

I have observed in many women, that so long as they have others to depend on, they seem rather helpless and inert, but when thrown suddenly on their own unassisted exertions, they show a coolness and energy unsuspected, hitherto, even by themselves. All peaceful occupations I had once preferred; now I felt happier and stronger for the charge I had assumed to myself: this young brother I must maintain, shelter from want, shield from temptation, guide and direct. I thought over my grave responsibilities, and prayed that, with God's help, I might be found equal to them. No striking exhibition of talent was required, only a steady perseverance in small things; and perhaps some little privation, for which I was not unprepared. Hugh seemed tacitly to submit himself to me as his natural protector; my age giving me that position, which otherwise he might not have been so ready to concede.

My difficulties began when we arrived in London. We possessed not there a single friend or rela-

tive on whose assistance we could call: of course Mr Flinte was out of the question; and I may truly say that the ways of Wensleydale were not as the ways of London. Everybody seemed possessed with an insane anxiety to cheat us, whilst I was equally firm in my determination not to be cheated. I began to understand Aunt Thomasine's feelings when people tried to impose on her, and I have no hesitation in saying, that to the first town landladies who had the pleasure of replying to my inquiries about lodgings, I must have appeared a short-tempered, decisive female of the strong-minded order. After encountering more trials than I care to chronicle, in the search after a roof under which to lay our heads, I installed myself as mistress of three rooms: or, perhaps I should say, of one room and two closets, bare of furniture. They underwent a thorough cleansing under my superintendence, were decently fitted up, that Hugh might feel himself comfortable, and there we were—at home in London!

I accompanied Hugh in a cab the first morning he went to Mr Flinte's office, and made him over to the head-clerk, with much the same form and cere-

mony as are observed by mothers on first taking their boys to school. I imagined myself to be acting in a highly proper and respectful way ; though I have reason to think that my brother was twitted about it afterwards, as queer, old-fashioned, and unnecessary. I did not feel very favourably impressed by the aspect of things in general amongst which I left him : all looked so dingy, black, and uncomfortable ; but as he seemed perfectly satisfied and not in the least surprised, I hoped all was right, and that he would have a pleasant report to make when he came home to tea : we had settled that he should dine at a coffee-house in the city, as our lodgings were a long way from the office. Mr Flinte's private residence was in a very dull street of large, private houses, called Portland Place : I called there twice, but did not find him at home on either occasion, and though I left my name, he did not think it needful to return my visit. I daresay people of business have not time to be so punctilious as quiet, country folks ; still he might have had the civility to inquire after me : which he did not do, even of Hugh, whom he saw daily.

I was very busy, during the first day of my brother's absence, in trimming and garnishing our room : I cannot bear to live in a desert, and by the time he returned, by dint of arranging old friends, in the shape of books, boxes, and ornaments, about it, I had contrived to give it a distant family resemblance to the parlour in our former home. But we missed the garden and the river : here we could only look out on the street and houses opposite—a gloomy prospect for eyes that had always delighted in fields, and woods, and purple moors. Hugh professed himself charmed, and it was not for me to complain ; my chief object now was to make home pleasant to him, and I was happy to see him so easily contented. When he had duly admired the results of my labours, he proceeded to give me an account of his day's doings ; he had come home in very good spirits, evidently contented with his brief experience.

“ After you left, Mr Purvis (that's the head-clerk, Grisell), took me into another room, where there were as many as a dozen young men ; he appointed me to a place at a desk, and marched off again. Presently Mr Flinte sent for me, and gave

me good moral sentences and the like, then dismissed me; but who do you think I met going from one room to another?" Indeed I could not tell. "John Nevil! he was at the Grammar School a year or two: head boy, you recollect: he is the second son of Mr Nevil of Thorney, and he's articled to Uncle Flinte. I was as glad to see him as could be, and though he's several years older than I am, he made friends directly."

"Indeed! and is he a clever young man, and steady?" I asked.

"Clever! yes, I should think he is: he used to be first in everything—work and play both. He seems a great favourite, and he is very merry; but you will have an opportunity of seeing him, for he said he would call in some evening and play chess with me when his father goes out of town again. You will like him, Grisell, I'm sure." His good-nature to my boy was a recommendation already.

"One of the fellows asked me very politely, how we had left Mr and Mrs Noah: I knew he was quizzing, so I said, they were in excellent health, and had particularly desired to be remembered to him, of whom they entertained an ancient recollec-

tion : they all laughed ; it takes very little to make them laugh. Mr Purvis looked in, and they stopped in a minute : all but Nevil, who seems privileged. Then after, I had to make copies of some letters. As I was coming away, Mr Flinte called for me, and asked what languages I had learnt besides my own. I said, " Latin and Greek." He turned off very sharply, and said, he would advise me to forget them, and learn something more likely to be of use—German and French. I do know a little French, and you might teach me more, Grisell."

I had not sufficient confidence, however, in my attainments to undertake this, and therefore made inquiries of our landlady, Mrs Davis, for some language master to give him instructions ; and one being found, Hugh set to work in the evenings, very diligently, to repair his deficiencies. He also learnt some abstruse kind of accounts, such as are not taught at grammar schools, until my only fear was, that he would study himself ill ; but he laughed at my warnings : and certainly he did not appear to suffer by it.

Let it not be imagined that I spent all my day idle, either. My calculations had not been very accu-

rate, and I soon found that my godmother's legacy would be exhausted before the three years were out, if I did not find some means to add to it. I did not think it right that any nonsensical pride should prevent me working in any way I could for this purpose. Teaching was altogether out of my province, and besides, it would have taken me from home; for fancy-work I had no taste, so there was nothing but plain sewing left. I spoke to Mrs Davis, who promised me her help, and, after an interval, I procured some fine linen to make for a family in which she had once been nurse-maid.

Later on, when Mr Flinte relaxed towards us somewhat, I mentioned our circumstances and my efforts to him; whereupon he ordered his housekeeper to send me all the needlework required in his establishment: this kept me pretty closely employed; though I cannot say there was much profit from it, for, on the plea of our being relatives, Mr Flinte only paid me two-thirds of the ordinary price. I did not tell Hugh of these matters, as I thought it quite needless to burden his boy's mind with cares that he could not lessen. We were very happy thus. I conclude, that the main thing towards

making a woman content is some object in view : a duty to perform, no matter who for, and some one to love. When we had been in London a month, Hugh and I together wrote a long letter to Aunt Thomasine, detailing all our proceedings ; to which she replied, that it had cheered her very much, as she had had many misgivings about us. She also inquired the price of butter and eggs, which, I remember, she afterwards alluded to as a "wicked imposition." Domestic economy was the good old lady's hobby.

XXVI.

One evening in September, I was finishing a complicated garment, sitting close by the window to catch the last glimmer of daylight ; the fire had been lighted and burnt cheerily, the tea-things were on the table : I waited only for Hugh. My work done, I put it away, and looked out of the door at the clock on the stair-case : it was a little beyond his usual time, and I began to wonder what detained him. To beguile the moments, I set myself

to watch the passers in the street, who were not very many at that hour. Presently an organ-boy appeared with a little train of children and idle boys at his heels ; he stopped opposite the house and began to play : others strayed up, attracted by the sound, until there was quite a little crowd collected. Then came the lamplighter ; the gas seemed to extinguish the faint daylight that still lingered, and as the fire-shine in the room made me as conspicuous to those below as they were to me, I was preparing to lower the blind, when my attention was arrested by the figure of a youth, who leant against the lamp-post with his head thrown back ; the attitude reminded me forcibly of poor Alan : could it be him ? I determined to go gently across the street, and for that purpose threw on a shawl and bonnet, keeping my eye all the while on his movements ; then hastily running down stairs, I opened the door : but during that moment the place was empty, and though I searched about and remained until the crowd dispersed, I saw no more of the boy. I was deeply disappointed : but after all I might have been mistaken. This circumstance had caused me to forget Hugh's prolonged absence ; which, as

it had never occurred before, now began to make me uneasy. At last I heard his voice, and with it another more manly. What was my surprise when Cousin Harley entered! He had sought Hugh at Mr Flinte's office, and come on to spend the evening with us. He was looking remarkably well and in high spirits, but I awkwardly quenched them by an allusion to the last time we had met. He told us that he had come up to town on business, on the issue of which depended the length of his stay; and when Hugh went out to his French master, who lived a few doors from us, he told me what that business was.

Little had I suspected my share in it. He sought me for his wife: he had loved me all along, and had meant to tell me so, when an observation that my father made against marriage between cousins had deterred him: my own indifference on that occasion proving also that he had no deeper interest in my heart than a quiet sisterly affection.

He said he could offer me a good home, and that Hugh should be taken into the house in which he himself was now a junior partner. I thanked him from my heart; but *then* I had not that love to give

him which alone sanctifies marriage: and no secondary motive of a selfish nature could induce me to accept his offer. He pleaded with me to give him a hope for the future, however faint; but I silently shook my head, though unbidden tears rose to my eyes at the sight of the pain I was inflicting; and yet—yet I do believe he went away not quite discouraged: though why he should I cannot tell, for I am certain I gave him no encouragement.

For more than a fortnight he remained in town, seeing us almost daily, and showing Hugh more of the wonders of the town than the dear boy could have seen, but for his kindness.

It quite strengthened me to know that there was some one who had an interest in me for my own sake, and I regretted that I could not return his honest affection. When he was gone back to Edinburgh, I missed him as we do miss friends when we can count but few: he, however, wrote more frequently than formerly, which showed that he did not forget us; and soon we began to look for his letters as a pleasant break in the week's monotony.

Every evening at twilight, I now kept careful watch, if by any chance I might again see that

figure which had before escaped me ; but it never reappeared, and by degrees the impression faded away, as such momentary ones must. I told Hugh, however, and said, if Providence should throw him in his brother's way, he should bring him home ; no matter how lost or miserable he might have become : it was not for us to shut a door against him, if he would return.

XXVII.

At Christmas, Mr Flinte surprised Hugh and me with an invitation to dinner ; and on this occasion I first learnt that my uncle possessed a wife and daughter. It was a very important event to us, and gave rise to much discussion both before and after : for my part, but for the dread of giving offence to our august patron, I should have very much liked to decline it ; but this Hugh would not hear of. Being in deep mourning, there was no outlay required for dress, and I felt quite proud of Hugh, he was such a fine, honest-looking boy, as Uncle Flinte presented him to his wife and daughter.

Mrs Flinte was a tame, lady-like person, very brilliantly attired; Blanche was tall, silent, and haughty; very handsome moreover: she approved of Hugh, and attached him to her side during the greater part of the evening. The party was a large one, and I judged, from the diffident manners and shabby genteel dress of several, that they were, like ourselves, poor relations bidden to an annual feast by the great man of the family. Everybody seemed to have come for the purpose of being stiff and uncomfortable. Mrs Flinte performed her duties as hostess with an uncongenially languid air, while her husband loomed in impressive respectability: a tacit reproach to several there assembled.

I glanced down the long, richly furnished table at the guests opposite me. There was a widow lady, very gaunt and grave, with three hungry sons; they reminded me of notes of exclamation by the ejaculatory style of their discourse, and the way in which they echoed each precious remark that fell from Mr Flinte's lips with unctuous richness. Next to the hostess was seated a pale, anxious man, whose utterance was thick, and who drank a great quantity of wine in a slow, ruminative way, intensely

unpleasant to see: I needed no one to tell me his history; it was legible enough in his shaking hand and dulled countenance. Directly before me was a more agreeable character; he was still young, with a florid complexion and light hair; he was addressed as "poor Dick." Why *poor*, I wondered, for he seemed a merry wight: I was told that he undertook nothing that ever prospered, and that ill-luck dogged him like his shadow; if so, ill-luck had certainly fallen, for once, into cheerful company. Next to Miss Flinte was a superior-looking person, with a singularly good face; he was young, and did not seem in flourishing circumstances. Blanche paid him more attention than the rest of us, and several times, when he addressed her, the colour rose to her cheek; and I do not think the tell-tale sign was overlooked by him any more than by me: yet they did not seem happy or at ease together, and Mrs Flinte, with all her languor, kept a watchful eye upon them; as no doubt they felt.

Nothing worth calling conversation took place; I never had the honour of assisting at a drearier ceremonial than that dinner: it was a freezing process

to all but "poor Dick," who tried to be funny, but could only raise funereal smiles, and so gave it up as a hopeless case. Hugh's tongue was audible, occasionally speaking to some juveniles like himself, who belonged to the gentleman who drank; and he seemed to enjoy himself amazingly—not being troubled with bashfulness as some were. As for the "notes of exclamation," I quite felt for them: they evidently thought it part of their duty, as poor guests, to sit on the extreme edge of their chairs, and to be always listening for something from their host, of which they might express unqualified approval.

Never for one moment did Mr Flinte relax from his stately self-consciousness or bland frigidity: the grateful faces around him (for I believe many there did admire him and thank him in their hearts) could not thaw him into kindness; the good deed he was doing lost its merit from the lack of spirit with which it was carried out: it seemed as if the Christmas fog from without had come an unbidden guest to the table, and chilled us all by its unseen presence. Glad was I when Mrs Flinte gave a little monitory cough, and we returned to the gay drawing-room. The widow lady took

possession of our hostess, and inflicted on her a lengthy panegyric on the virtues of her three sons. Blanche seated herself on a couch by me, but did not seem disposed for conversation. There was a dreary, miserable expression on her beautiful face, that touched me; but she was not the kind of girl to whom I could have offered unsought comfort, and she did not seem one likely to ask it. Presently in came the gentleman who had sat next her at dinner, and my brother Hugh; the latter came up to us immediately, but the other hovered round the piano and music-books: one imploring look he directed towards Blanche, but she slightly shook her head and turned to me.

“Are you fond of music? do you sing?” she asked; then without waiting for a reply, she added: “Will you come up stairs with me?” I assented, and we left the room together. She took me into a pretty dressing-room, where there was a fire, and leaving me to look at the water-colour drawings that adorned the walls, she sat down at a table and began to write hastily. When she had finished, she observed, carelessly: “Those pictures are done by that young man whom we left in the drawing-room: by the by, I ought to have made you better

known to him, for he is your cousin as well as mine."

In returning to the drawing-room, we encountered this gentleman; he spoke hurriedly to Blanche, who gave the written paper into his hand; he then went away. I was not pleased to be made a witness of this clandestine correspondence, but as Blanche made no explanation, I said nothing, and soon after we left. There was a great deal of kindness at the bottom of this girl's heart, for seeing that my wraps were less warm and luxurious than her own, she brought out a fine sable boa and twisted it round my neck. I objected to borrowing it; whereupon she told me, it was a Christmas gift, and I must wear it for her sake. "Papa says you are a singular woman," she added, kissing me; "but I wish I had you for a sister.—May I come to see you sometimes?" I said, I should be glad if she would, and so we separated.

XXVIII.

Blanche Flinte's visits were very frequent, but never long. At length I began to suspect that

she made them a pretext for meeting Mr Herbert, and had determined to challenge her with it ; when Hugh one evening returned with news that converted my suspicions into certainty. She had been privately married to Mr Herbert some weeks, and had at last left her father's house, and gone abroad with him. Mr Flinte was half frantic : he had entertained magnificent designs for his daughter, and this cousin whom she had married was an artist ; and, what was worse, an artist unknown to fame. My uncle came to me furious, charging me with having aided her in her wicked plots ; but he calmed down when I reminded him that the marriage had already taken place when I first saw his daughter. I heard afterwards of the pair living in great poverty in Rome, whither they had gone that Mr Herbert might study his profession ; but Mr Flinte neither pardoned his child nor gave them any assistance from his great abundance.

This event had much influence on Hugh's fortunes. Mr Flinte, from having been penurious, now became ostentatiously lavish towards him, affording him all the privileges of a son : indeed,

but for the disinclination I showed, he would have taken him to live in his house altogether. I thought, however, that there was not much dependence to be placed on the favour of my uncle ; and, besides, I could not have borne to see Hugh filling a place not his by right, while the one to whom it belonged was suffering want. I told Mr Flinte this plainly, and ventured to intercede for Blanche. He heard me with manifest impatience, and said, that as she had made her bed so must she lie upon it ; but he never showed any resentment against me for my interference. It made me very happy to feel that my opinion and Hugh's were the same on this point : he had no wish to benefit by his cousin's disgrace. " After all, Grisell," said he, " I would rather work my way to wealth, if it is ever to be mine, than acquire it by underhand means ; or even by a lucky chance such as this, which Nevil blames me for not making the most of."

Though I did not greatly approve of this Mr Nevil as a companion for Hugh, they were very intimate friends, and became more so as my brother grew older ; especially as he then went frequently to the house of Nevil's father, who resided in Lon-

don some part of the year. A sad circumstance separated them, and brought indelible disgrace on a respectable and honoured family, towards the conclusion of our third year in town. I knew from observations that I had heard my brother make, that Nevil led a very irregular life, and had a taste for gambling and other pursuits, which his father's ample allowance and his own salary enabled him to indulge to an injurious degree. There was no need to warn Hugh against his example, for he regretted it much ; and fond as he was of his cheerful society, he by degrees detached himself from his companionship, until they were very rarely if ever together except during business hours.

Nevil held a confidential post in Mr Flinte's office, and was a great favourite with that gentleman ; who probably was not aware of the habits he had contracted, or it is scarcely likely he would have given him the situation he held. I shall never forget Hugh's agony when the discovery was made that young Nevil had forged his employer's name, and thus obtained money for the furtherance of his pleasures—not once only, but several times : at first for small sums, until impunity making him

bolder, he had done so to such an extent that suspicion was raised, and he was detected. Mr Flinte said that if he had been his own son he would have abandoned him to the law. He was examined, and committed for trial, but found means to destroy himself in prison soon after.

How my heart ached for his unhappy parents ! for his gray-headed father, for his tender mother, and for those others, the playmates of his boyhood, who, bearing his name, shared also his disgrace ! And this might have been the miserable fate of my darling Hugh ! How ardently did I pray Heaven to keep him from temptation ! to preserve him honest and upright throughout his course ! Never before had my heavy responsibilities weighed on me painfully. Now that he was passing from boyhood, I might no longer have the same influence over him as hitherto. I looked at him as he sat before me, with his fine face bowed down on his arms, weeping such tears for his old companion as none need be ashamed to shed. I had never seen him thus moved before ; not even in our deepest family afflictions : and I think the effect of that terrible warning never quite wore off his mind.

Aunt Thomasine wrote me word that Thorney old Hall was shut up, and that the family were not intending to return : they had gone to live permanently abroad. Such far-spreading effects has the sin of one member of a family. Silent fears often now agitated me for poor Alan : if this young man, with every luxury at his command, had strayed so far from the right, to what extremity might not he have been driven in his wanderings ! The year closed drearily with this event.

XXIX.

Mr Flinte kept his promise of giving Hugh a regular salary at the expiration of a certain term ; and, small as it was, we could not now have done without it. For three years longer we went on without much change, if any, in our habits of life. I saw my dear brother grow up to manhood, earnest, and full of promise ; grave beyond his years, and with an aim in view which I well understood, though he never spoke of it. I believe this hope had been with him from the first ; it now began to

shape itself into form and distinctness; he placed it steadily before him, and directed his course towards it, looking beyond obstacles, or determined to overcome them. What there was of selfish in the longing to restore his name to its old rank, he saw not: ambition wore its fairest mask to dazzle him. It was not so much personal aggrandizement that he sought, as that Randal of Thorney should once again be a known and honoured name in the land.

Mr Flinte now offered him the situation that the unfortunate Nevil had held; and, after giving him a fair trial, he raised him to that which Mr Purvis had occupied until ill-health compelled him to resign it. Thus he rose step by step, until, from being dependent on me, we changed places, and he supported me. When I remonstrated against this faintly, he said, "Oh! Grisell, do you think I have been blind all these six years? do you think I have not found out before this how you have worked and denied yourself for me?" So I said no more about it, and was quite content in my new position.

Our changed circumstances entailed some trouble on us; in the first place, we rose from being lodg-

ers to the dignity of householders, and the first visitors we entertained in our new abode were Aunt Thomasine and Cousin Harley. Nothing could equal the delight of the former when she saw how comfortable we were. "Oh!" cried she, with clasped hands, "would that your father and mother had lived to see this day! how would their hearts have been gladdened!"

It was a long journey for my aunt to make at her years, and therefore we kept her with us several months, during which another Burndale friend visited us. This was Dr Larke of the Grammar School, Hugh's former master. He had come to town for medical advice, his eyesight having failed so much lately that there was great risk of his losing it altogether, if remedies could not speedily be found. His daughter Mary accompanied him, and they took lodgings not far from our house. When we quitted Burndale, Mary Larke was a sparkling little fairy of nine years old, everybody's pet; now she was become an exceedingly pretty and amiable girl, not particularly clever or brilliant, but so full of animation and warm-heartedness that she irresistibly attracted all who approached her.

“She reminds me of little Sunshine in her best days,” remarked Aunt Thomasine. Poor little Sunshine! hers was a cherished name amongst us now. Time and absence had worn away all lingering bitterness and resentment. She lived in our remembrance only in her winning ways, her beauty, and her grace: wherever we met with youth, or gaiety, or loveliness, there we found something to recall her who had been the light of our home. If she would have come back to us, she would have had nothing but words of warm, loving welcome—open hearts and open hands to greet her.

XXX.

The Doctor had not told Mary of the calamity that threatened him, but he came to talk to me about it often; and presently I learnt, from what he told me of the physician's opinion, that there was but a faint chance of saving his sight. His spirits were naturally very much depressed; he had been compelled to resign his post in the Grammar School from inability to discharge its duties any longer,

and, never having been a provident man, his circumstances were now much straitened in consequence. His daughter, who seemed but to live for him, soon detected that some secret care weighed on his mind. "Miss Randal, I am afraid papa is not well," said she, one day when I called on them; "he will sit silent sometimes for an hour together, and he neither reads nor writes as he used to do—not even his letters. I wish he would go back to Burndale, for I am sure it agreed with him better than London does." I asked the Doctor's permission to tell her the worst; it seemed needless to keep her in ignorance of what she must inevitably know sooner or later: he acquiesced reluctantly, and when we were next alone I told her.

"Blind!" she exclaimed; then paused, as if words were too weak to express her compassion:—"blind!—oh, poor papa!" She left me immediately, and returned to her home, eager to offer her comfort and kindness to him who was soon to be entirely dependent on them. At length they gave up all intention of returning to Burndale, and settled themselves permanently in London. The Doctor obtained an engagement on some philoso-

phical journal, and, with Mary for amanuensis and reader, managed to discharge its duties very well ; and his active mind having fallen on suitable employment, he became more resigned to the calamity that was now swiftly creeping over him.

One evening Hugh and I walked up to see them after tea : it was a lovely July evening, and we were far enough from the city to breathe pure air and see trees of a natural green, in an hour's walk. We found them together in the parlour : Dr Larke was busy dictating to his daughter. Mary whispered to me that the article must be finished that evening, and I saw at once that our visit was inopportune ; yet the poor girl looked so weary and feverish that I longed to see her out of doors. I offered to take her place. " No, no !" exclaimed her father ; " Mary understands my way the best : she is a very good girl, as quiet as a mouse ; and yet she contrives to be eyes, hands, and almost wits, to me sometimes ; and she never complains of being tired."

She had, however, taken the opportunity of our talking to the Doctor to lay down her pen and rest her eyes, over which she pressed her hands as if to.

ease their aching. "This will never do," thought I: "the child will lose her health." I noticed her as she leant back in her chair: her cheeks flushed, her dark-brown hair pushed up from her brow, and a placid gravity resting on the lips, where used to lurk such arch dimpling smiles. I think Hugh observed it too, for he said, "Doctor, send Mary out into the fields with Grisell for a walk. I will write for you a couple of hours, and perhaps then the article will be finished." This proposal met with more favour than mine had done, and was accepted: so forth we went.

There was still so much of the child left in Mary that she could find pleasure in gathering the wild-flowers that spangled the meadows: even the tiny rose-lipped daisies, the golden buttercups, and the faint meadowsweet. Her frolicsome humour was only damped, not quenched. "Oh! Miss Randal, don't you long for a race across Burndale Moor against the wind?" cried she: "I used to enjoy it so much. The air here does not taste so fresh and balmy as that which comes sweeping down the fells: sometimes I can scarcely breathe in it; I gasp and gasp as if I were out of my native ele-

ment altogether." We sat down to rest, looking towards the city. "And Thorney woods," continued my companion, "how quiet and dreamy they will be! the nuts won't be ripe yet, you know, and we might stay there the live-long day without meeting a soul. Then the hedge-roses are out, and the hay is down, but not yet gathered in; and the poppies are looking with blushing brightness from amongst the waving corn. Oh! how I wish we two were sitting on that steep hill just under Thorney wood, with all the valley at our feet, and no sounds about us but the songs of birds!—or on Leyburn Shawl, either! We should have a long way to go home, but our eyes would be cheered with beauty all the while. Do you know, Miss Randal, I could never go up there without thinking of Mary Stuart flying from her prison at Bolton, and being overtaken like a poor, wearied, hunted hare, at that dell in the woods which the country-people still call 'Queen Mary's Gap'? I wonder whether she had any thoughts of the glories of the valley, or whether she was blind to all but her own dreary destiny." She pleased herself for a long time with recalling scenes endeared by

early recollection, until scattered lights began to gleam through the cloud that overhung the city, and reminded us that it was time to turn our steps homewards. Dr Larke had not got to the end of his work, and Hugh was still writing when we returned ; therefore I waited for half-an-hour until he had finished, that Mary might not have to resume her task again that night at least. I felt rather sorry to leave that bright-spirited girl in the close dingy parlour of their lodgings : she seemed as much out of her place as a daisy would do growing deep down in the gloom of a mine. But there was a braver heart under her lightsome ways than I suspected : home for her was not in any particular spot of earth, but there with her beloved father. I doubt not that in time that room grew dear to her. What place is there so desolate that the young fancy cannot weave there its happy gossamer dreams !

XXXI.

“ It seems to me, Grisell, that we are very often alone in the evenings, now,” remarked Aunt Thoma-

sine, with a brisk air, as if a novel and pleasant idea had struck her suddenly. I acquiesced. "I should not wonder now if Hugh were at Doctor Larke's," added she. "The doctor is a clever man and an entertaining companion, when you can get him off his philosophy; very profitable for Hugh, I'm sure, his society will be: I am glad he has the sense to take advantage of it." I did not undeceive my aunt, but I had for some months suspected that the magnet which drew my brother so frequently away from home, was at those lodgings; though I cannot say I imagined it to be the old schoolmaster—rather little Mary indeed. But Hugh had not opened his mind to me. There are some confidences into which we do not desire that our nearest and dearest should penetrate until our own good time, therefore I was patiently waiting for him to speak. Meanwhile a change had come over Mary: on some days I observed a shy avoidance of even Hugh's name; on others, she listened with eager delight to any trivial anecdotes of his boyish days that I could tell her; again, when she heard his steps advancing with firm yet hasty tread up the street, she would cease talking, and her colour came

and went like a rosy flush on sunset clouds. It did not need a very subtle seer to interpret these signs; still, more than once, I seemed to have passed too hastily to a conclusion, and I asked myself, whether I was deceived or not. Hugh's behaviour was puzzling and unsatisfactory in the extreme. If he loved Mary, and I believed he did, why would he not speak out. He went to the doctor's almost every evening, and to my knowledge lightened his daughter's labours considerably. His countenance was often grave and preoccupied—not always, as it seemed, pleasantly either: I, who knew him so well, was in the dark here. It is true we cannot deeply penetrate into the inner life of others: there are always cells closed and sealed which keep their secrets fast; speculation is foiled for once before their mystery. I was foiled here, and felt intuitively that I must seek no further.

Aunt Thomasine exhausted her fancy by suggesting all manner of difficulties connected with business that might be weighing on his mind. I could not imagine that it was anything of the sort; had a difference occurred between him and Mr Flinte, I was sure he would have told me: and,

besides, soon after my uncle gave him a small share in the firm, so that possibility was set at rest. "Now," thought I, "he must speak: he is in a position to claim Mary any day, if he has been held back hitherto by the uncertainty of his means of maintaining her in comfort." But, on the contrary, he discontinued his visits to the doctor's almost entirely, and though I saw him looking dejected and spiritless, he would make no admission that he suffered. Could Mary have refused him? Could I have completely misunderstood those signs which women are so quick to detect? I was still quite in the dark, and likely to remain there, for Aunt Thomasine was going back to Burndale, and it had been settled that I should return with her and stay over Christmas.

XXXII.

The night before we left London, my aunt retired early to strengthen herself against the fatigue of our journey on the morrow; I was left alone with my brother. He had spread out on the table

before him a large sheet of paper, which he was intently studying; there was a singular light shining in his eyes; his stern lips were somewhat relaxed; he looked not unlike my father as he was in his milder moods: this emboldened me to speak of what I had had on my mind all day, since I had been in the morning to take leave of Mary.

"I understand, Hugh," said I, "that our friends the Larkes are going further away from London." He murmured, "Indeed!" without raising his eyes from the paper.

"Yes," I continued, "the doctor thinks he can carry on his writings as well at a distance, and it will be better for Mary." He started as if he were stung, but said nothing. "Mary said I was to give her regards to you: she is not sorry to leave London, which evidently does not suit her, for she has lost nearly all her colour." He was thoroughly alive now to every word I uttered, though he feigned to be giving me only half his attention.

"She leads a dreary life, poor child; I am afraid her father has not the consideration for her he might have: she can rarely leave the house, he keeps her so very closely employed. He inquired of me

what you were about that they saw you so rarely."

"And what did you say?"

"That I could not tell."

"Did you say Mary was looking—not well?"

"Yes." There was a long pause, during which my brother seemed to be poring over the paper, but I could tell, by the expression of his face, that his thoughts were elsewhere. He glanced up and caught my eyes watching him.

"What is it, Grisell?" he asked: "you seem more serious than usual to-night?"

"I was thinking of little Mary."

"What of her?" he pushed the paper from him, and came towards the fire: "what of her?"

"She will miss us when they leave: don't you think so?"

"Oh! she will make new friends."

"She has made none since they came here."

"When the doctor's talents become known, he will gather a circle about him."

"I thought you had more interest in them than I find you have." Again he winced; I was glad to see it, and determined not to spare him. I did

not like this mood of my brother's : it seemed as if his heart were hardening as he got forward in the world.

"I think her situation peculiarly painful: so young and so beautiful, with no other safeguard than her poor, blind father, who is as absent as scholars often are to what passes close beneath his spectacles: Mary will fade away like an early snow-drop, before he will find out that anything ails her."

"Grisell, what do you think the worthiest ambition?" my brother asked, as if desirous of changing the conversation.

"To *be* good and to *do* good."

"A true woman's answer: I expected it from you, sister; though some would have said it to be great or powerful."

"No one *can* be great without being also good."

"Trite, Grisell: very trite."

"Most truths are so."

"Is it permissible, or rather is it worth while, to overlook the small happiness that lies within our hand's reach for an uncertain future which might demand its sacrifice?"

"No it is not."

"There is no hesitation about you, sister. But supposing the happiness were not lost by being deferred — what then? We each understand the other's latent meaning, why should we speak thus in enigmatical phrase?"

"There are," said I, "some kinds of happiness which lose their subtle aroma if not instantly seized.—Oh, Hugh! my brother, you have made a pure, young heart dependent on you; why not knit it to yours with those ties of love which will outlast all your ambitious fancies?" He was much disturbed; he walked to and fro in the room for several minutes: at length he paused by the table, and drew towards him the paper, which I now saw was a copy of the Randal genealogy which Aunt Thomasine had once drawn up, with the help, I was told, of Miss Grisell Randall.

"Listen to me, Grisell," said he, forcibly: "ever since I was a boy at school, I have had one hope ever urging me forward; I have not lost sight of it for a moment. Its accomplishment may be distant, but I know that my hope is prophetic, for I will work up to its end, if life last, over every difficulty

and every distress. I will not turn aside to listen to the wooing of feeling however sweet : anything that might hamper my progress will I resolutely look away from." How his grave lips seemed sternly to compress themselves as he spoke thus hardly. I confess my sympathy could not go with him now : the cold abstraction of his ambition found no wakeful echo in my bosom.

"Do not condemn me hastily, sister," he continued ; "no word of love have I ever whispered to Mary : with this determination, I have not leisure or wish to gather any cares about me ; and when I saw that our close intimacy was dangerous for both—was undermining her peace and my future, I drew back—I trusted in time for her, if not for myself."

"But it was too late, Hugh, if she loved you."

"Grisell, I know not that she does."

"Hugh, is this wise ? If you would tell me the whole truth now, it would be that such a doubt wrings your heart.—You love her, I know you love her."

"Why so pertinacious, Grisell ? If I do love Mary—what then ? I can be silent : I can keep

away from her ; and her child's fancy will not retain me a month. It would be doing her a wrong to link her to my fate, now. I am restless : I am ambitious : I cannot curb the strong vitality within me into the narrow limits of a home such as ours would be. I should fret against its restraints : her love could not compensate me for what I must give up, and with less than all my heart, she could not be satisfied or happy. Oh ! Grisell, you know not what it is to cherish one solitary hope ; to feel it grow with your growth and strengthen with your strength, until it is so powerful, that you could almost sacrifice life itself, if you could see your end compassed even for a single day."

"Better live for yourself, Hugh, than for our ancestors;" said I, pointing to the pedigree. "Your ambition is no unworthy one, if it involve no dishonour ; but if it in the smallest degree tarnish that high and pure sense of right, which shone in your soul before its intrusion, then I say you had better remain obscure and laborious all the days of your life, than follow it one step further."

"Dishonour, Grisell ! it is to raise our name once more that I would strive : through me shall no stain of dishonour fall upon it, rest assured. Had I sought

Mary—did I now feel convinced that her love for me equalled mine for her—I should feel bound to sacrifice all for her : all my ambition, all my hopes. But it is not so : in a year she will have forgotten me : her nature is too light to be capable of lasting impression—too tender to mate with one so absorbed and grave as I. It is for both our good that we have parted as we did : you will acknowledge it yourself some day.”

“I would rather see you happy than great—good than powerful, my brother. I will try to believe what you say : you should know best.”

“Grisell, I love little Mary. Her pure eyes, her sweet, tender ways force me to love her ; my heart aches now that hers may not ache far, far more keenly hereafter : be satisfied, Grisell, be convinced. I must go on my destined path without burden, and without any cheer but yours, my true sister—let me have that still, for it has been my best pioneer hitherto.”

I could not restrain the tears that overflowed my eyes ; there was such a deep under-tone of suffering in what he said : he spoke then out of one of those secret cells of his heart, which was to be closed thenceforth for ever. He was right in

what he said, or thought himself so ; yet was not I convinced : women feel more justly than they argue, and sometimes the heart is a better umpire than the head. Even yet, my brother, I think your choice was wrong. Your way of life would have been all the pleasanter, with little Mary to bear you company, even though it had lain lower on the hill-side.

XXXIII.

On the morrow, Aunt Thomasine and I took our departure. I was sorry to leave Hugh at this juncture ; but he did not seem so : perhaps he felt that some struggles are best gone through alone. It was the end of January before I returned to London, and during my absence several events had taken place, all more or less influencing our affairs. The Herberts had come back to England, bringing two young children, and were settled in a small house at Islington. Mr Flinte continued as unrelenting as ever towards his daughter : he had refused to see her, or to afford them any assistance,

although Mr Herbert's income from his profession was barely sufficient to keep the wolf from the door. The Larkes had removed to Blackheath, so that it would be quite an expedition to go and see them. Hugh said he had been once, but had not found either the doctor or Mary at home: the woman of the house had told him, however, that both were quite well, and that they had had some friends staying with them. Comfortably domiciled with my brother, I found Cousin Harley, who had been in town ten days:—his business seemed to bring him up to London very frequently indeed, and always to detain him some weeks. It appeared to consist chiefly in putting my work-box out of order when I was sewing, and in carrying the watering-can when I was gardening:—I cannot at this moment call to mind anything more arduous or profitable that he did, though perhaps he might give a different account of it himself.

Hugh said the same thing as I, and considered it extremely absurd to see a man of nearly thirty so trifling and indolent.

But Cousin Harley had a purpose under his idleness. I never met with any one who, having taken

an idea into his head, held it fast so pertinaciously. He had more good qualities than I could count, and perhaps not the least of them in my eyes was—loving me.

What could I do—how could I prevent it? He had made up his mind that I should love him, and there being no sufficient reason why I should not, I ended by doing so with all my heart.

Hugh feigned, or felt, intense surprise; Aunt Thomasine offended me by saying she always knew it would be so.

To have sustained the romance of my character, I am aware that I ought to have pined in a sort of twilight melancholy to my death; but as I had now become a practical person like the rest of my family, and my brother needed my cares no longer, it was rather a relief to have some one like Cousin Harley on whom to inflict my superfluous energies. It was always the strongest want in my disposition to have something to do and to do it: I foresaw he would provide me with the work that was now lacking, for he had contracted many habits—especially a very bad one of having his own undisputed way—which it would clearly be my duty to break him off.

He has told me often, since, that I was an arch-deceiver, and if he had known how much fire was hypocritically veiled behind my mild eyes and pale features, he should scarcely have ventured to take me:—but I do not believe it; I rather think he was agreeably surprised, the first time it flashed out and betrayed its existence.

We were married. Not in London; that Aunt Thomasine would not hear of—but from her cottage in Burndale; and from thence we went to our home in Edinburgh. It is not much that I shall have henceforth to say of myself: we were too quietly happy to afford interest to anybody but each other.—To subtract still farther from the romance of the thing, I had completed my twenty-sixth year when I became a wife, and all the poetry was on Harley's side: if any there was. Hugh was rather downcast when we parted; his new brother endeavoured to cheer him.

“You have something in view, man; work up to it:—nothing like perseverance both for winning the race and keeping your spirits up while you are running it;” said he, with a significant glance at me: then, in a lower tone, he added: “I have

courted her more than ten years ;—court Fortune as steadily, and you will certainly win her : she can't be more shy than Grisell."

I was not intended to hear this, but I did hear it, and I thought it very——Well, no matter what I thought it : it is enough to say, that I resented it with proper spirit in due time.

XXXIV.

Hugh went back to his bachelor housekeeping in London very disconsolate, as he wrote me word ; and, shortly after, Mr Flintø having occasion to send some one to overlook certain business interests of his in the Levant, my brother, as the junior partner, was deputed to go. He remained at Smyrna three years ; calm, quiet eventless years they were to all of us—one of those soundless silences of happiness that often precede a sudden and total change which wakes us up again to the stern realities of life.

It had been agreed that Harley and I should meet Hugh in London on his return, and when we arrived

there, we found my Uncle Flinte, who had invited us to make his house our home during our stay, very dangerously ill :—so, at least, the physicians thought, though he himself would not acknowledge it. Mrs Flinte had fallen into a state of querulous feebleness, and was equally as reluctant as her husband to credit the possibility of his disorder having a fatal termination. My brother did not reach town until three days later than ourselves, and in the interval I had many long conversations with my uncle.

One morning early, before I had left my room indeed, a note was brought to me, with a message, that the bearer was waiting in the hall; on opening it, I found it was from Mrs Herbert. Hastily dressing myself, I went down, and found a person, whom I had no difficulty in recognising as my cousin Blanche, shrouded though she was in a long cloak and with a thick veil over her face. I led her into a room where we were secure from interruption, my heart aching for the penury and suffering her whole appearance betrayed. It was some time before she could collect strength to speak.

“Mrs Harley, this is the first time I have been

within my father's doors since we last met," she said at length, "and now I come secretly, like a thief. He is ill—at death's door, I am told—and yet he refuses to see me or my children." Her face, that I remembered so beautiful, was now worn and haggard; her eyes had the eager, wild look of constant suffering—of want; yet they filled with tears as she spoke.

"Bring me to a sight of him," she continued; "if he knew half what we have gone through, he would think I had been punished more than enough, and he would forgive me: I'm sure he would, Grisell." So humble: so subdued: poor, poor Blanche! I said I would leave her there and go to her father myself, and speak for her. After a restless night, Mr Flinte was up and dressed already: he was not surprised to see me, as I had read the newspaper to him the day before, and he expected the same attention again, for he handed me the "Times" as soon as he had said good morning, with the remark that he was anxious to learn how a certain public matter, affecting commercial interests, progressed.

"Uncle," I began, "I want to talk to you

about something that ought to be dearer to you than any money matters in the world—about Blanche.” He seemed too much surprised by my audacity to check me ; I was astonished myself, but I knew that he was most easily dealt with thus : any attempt to cajole him would only have raised a storm of anger. “Yes, about your daughter,” I continued : “she is in my room now ; she entreats to see you : you cannot refuse her what in a few days it may be no longer in your power to grant. Forgive her, as you hope to be forgiven.” He eyed me sullenly.

“She left me of her own accord : I have nothing more to do with her,” he said, harshly. “She chose to follow that beggarly Herbert, and I do not want her to come fawning about me again.”

“But, sir, she has suffered, bitterly suffered. She has felt what you can have no conception of : she has seen her children want bread ! think what that is, sir.” A dark remorse filled his eyes, but he spoke relentlessly still.

“Whose fault is it ? I knew Herbert could not keep her : I always told her so ; but she was determined to have her own way. Let her abide by the

consequences : it is no business of mine ; I have done with her."

"If you could see her, uncle—if you could see her, so poor, so worn, and thin!—I am sure you would fold her in your arms, and forgive her all."

"Niece, I used to think you a sensible woman : pray, what do you expect to gain by bringing those people about me ?" he asked, with a sharp upward glance of his keen eye.

"Nothing," I answered : "It is not a matter of profit or loss to me or mine, but one of duty to yourself and Blanche."

"Ah, indeed!" he returned, with that sneer of incredulity with which he always met an assertion of disinterestedness : "Then I will renew a proposal that I made to her personally some years since :—let her leave Herbert and promise never to see him again, and I will forgive her : I will restore her to her place in my house ; I will not even reproach her for her disobedience and ingratitude."

"Uncle, you cannot mean what you say!" I indignantly exclaimed : "I dare not carry to her so cruel a message : oh ! change it."

"On no other terms will I receive her."

"All the world would cry shame on you if it could hear so iniquitous a proposal. She has a higher duty to perform towards her husband and children than towards you, now."

"Duty: fudge! where was her sense of duty when she stole secretly out of her father's house and married against his permission?"

"Uncle, she waited for it three years—until she was of age, when the law permits a child to throw off the authority of a parent if it be too arbitrarily exercised."

"Do you expect to aid her by proving me in the wrong?"

"I do:—for I know you would not do a wilful injustice to any one not of your blood; and, I believe, if you were convicted of wrong towards Blanche, you would hasten to repair it."

A hard, resolute expression came over his face.

"Then let me tell you, niece, that I am persuaded I am *right*; and, being so, I will not stir one iota."

I left the room and sought Mrs Flinte. She had not yet risen. I had always known her to be a selfish, querulous woman, but I was certainly not prepared for the heartless indifference with which she

received my story and my entreaties that she would exert her influence with her husband.

"Influence, Mrs Harley! influence!" she echoed, petulantly: "you don't know your uncle: it is like wasting words on a stone to talk to him. If he will not listen to you, I am sure he will not to me. Blanche was a bad, wicked girl to do as she did, and I wish she would stay away; especially now her father is so ill, and the doctors forbid any excitement of mind."

In going down stairs, I met Harley; he put a fifty pound note into my hand, silently, but I knew for what purpose he destined it. Blanche rose and came eagerly towards me as I entered the room, with extended hands.

"He will see me—will he not?" she cried. I shook my head. "Tell me all he said to you." I hesitated. "I know that it would be cold—harsh, perhaps; but tell me," she continued. I put the money into her hands; she looked at it: "Then he does relent: he was touched at the recital of our extreme misery."

"I think he was touched."

"Oh, Grisell, what we suffered last winter! If

he could have seen our bare room ! and my poor baby—it died, Grisell—died of real want. I came again and again, but was always turned away, until Herbért forbade me to come any more ; and, afterwards, I fell ill myself—I might have died too, and none here would have known, or cared perhaps : I thought my mother might have felt for me, but she always stood in great fear of my father.”

I promised to go to her lodgings on the morrow, and in the meantime to urge Mr Flinte to recall her. As we went across the hall, I fancied some person called my name, and thinking it was Harley, after letting Mrs Herbert out myself, I ran up stairs ; to my surprise, I met my uncle.

“ Is that woman, Blanche ? ” he asked, seizing my arm and drawing me into his room : “ Blanche ! —it cannot be.”

“ Yes, sir, that woman is your daughter.”

“ So forlorn—good God ! ” He sat silent for several minutes.

“ Yes, sir, so forlorn, so pined, that you can scarcely recognise her.” I repeated to him what she had told me ; but all the words in the world could not have gone so far, as that one stolen mo-

mentary glance at her wan, woe-worn face, in convincing him of what he ought to do. He desired that I would leave him, and I went; trusting that a few hours silent communion with his own conscience would be better than further argument.

XXXV.

What the result of his reflections might have been, none ever knew; for when his servant entered his room late in the morning, he was still sitting in the chair where I had left him, but cold in death. Paper and ink were on the table before him, and his stiffened fingers still clutched the pen with which he had been preparing to write. To write what? Doubtless words of forgiveness to his child. Even in *his* breast, there must have lain some natural tenderness for her—though she had been so long outcast from his heart and home—which the sight of her might have quickened.

In the hurry consequent upon this event, Hugh arrived, and Mrs Flinte sent for her daughter. Harley and I removed to an hotel, where my brother also joined us. It was our intention to remain over the funeral, and then to return to Edinburgh.

The lawyer, in whose hands my uncle's will was placed, having desired my husband's presence at the opening of it, he went. Its provisions were most extraordinary. After giving to Mrs Flinte a certain sum for her life only, everything was bequeathed to Hugh, without reserve. It was extremely brief, and the name of Blanche did not once occur : my uncle Flinte might have had no daughter. I was excessively shocked when Harley told me of this, and felt anxious to see Hugh to learn how he intended to act. That he would thus usurp the rights of Blanche and her children, I never for one moment imagined : I knew his honour too well for that.

"It is certainly a most iniquitous will, Grisell," observed Harley ; "but still it could not be set aside : it is dated the week after Mrs Herbert left her father's house, when Mr Flinte was in the fullest possession of his mental and bodily vigour."

"It is my belief that, had he lived a few hours longer, he would have wished to cancel it," said I ; and then I repeated what had passed between us on the day of his death. Harley was of my opinion.

Late in the evening, Hugh came in more weary

and jaded than I had ever seen him before. He threw himself at length on the couch and rang for wine; of which, when it was brought, he drank several glasses without pause. We felt awkward: congratulate him we could not, and he seemed not to like to begin to speak about the will; at last Harley asked him, if its provisions had not surprised him.

"Yes—it is an insane will," was his unhesitating reply: "I do not think my uncle was himself when he made it—I told Holmes so." (Holmes was the lawyer).

"And what said he?" I asked.

"That there was not a saner man in England than Mr Flinte—that it was my scruples *he* should rather consider mad."

"And you talked it over together?"

"Yes, we talked it over together; and I came to the conclusion, that there was but one course open to me, and that course to resign everything unconditionally to Blanche and her children."

"Right!" ejaculated Harley.

"Right!" echoed my brother: "of course it is right. But a more obstinate fellow to deal with than

Herbert, I never met with :—he says, that his wife shall not receive more than one-half of what her father has left ; and adds, what I think is very likely, that Mr Flinte would have undoubtedly given me something handsome, had the circumstances which led to his disinheriting Blanche never occurred. Holmes sat by, grinning sardonically ; thinking us a pair of fools, probably.”

“ And to what do you suppose the real and personal property amounts ? ”

“ Something less than fifty thousand pounds.”

“ Ah ! ” sighed my husband ; “ a very pretty ready-made fortune : but not so much as I imagined Mr Flinte had amassed.”

“ I have ordered Holmes to draw up a deed settling one-third on Blanche ; the rest to be equally divided amongst the children :—if she does not like the division when it is submitted to her, she can suggest any change she may desire ; but this is what I think her father would have done, had he not been so resentful. By settling a third upon her, she will be able to provide for Herbert should he survive her : when I spoke to him about it, he said he could not listen to such an arrangement ;

but Holmes will manage it, and bring him to reason."

"Some men will say you are Quixotic; I consider you are acting justly," observed Harley.

"My fortune is still to make, therefore: indeed this event throws me rather back in the world," said my brother. "But what would become of these thews and sinews, both of body and mind, whose best pleasure is still in action, if, by a great wind-fall of fortune, I were already a rich man? My house will stand more firmly if I build it stone by stone, than if it were raised at once like a castle in the air. What say you, Grisell: you sit there very silent?"

"That I am proud of my brother—that I honour him."

"Tut, tut, Grisell, I could have done no less:—it is just that plain household god that you used to set up before me when I was a boy—unadorned and not always pleasant to behold—yclept Duty, which pointed the way I had to go: and you have often said that to keep close to duty was no great merit. Give me some tea, sister, and let us forget the will for to-night."

XXXVI.

Harley and I having seen Hugh comfortably settled once more, and Mr Flinte's affairs arranged, were preparing to return to Edinburgh, and home, when there came a letter from Marian. Our correspondence had been rare and interrupted; more particularly of late, on account of the erratic movements of the Langleys; but they were now settled for a time at Bienne, a little town in Switzerland, and my sister urged me to go and see her—and to go soon. Harley and I sat in consultation on this letter: business required his return; but there was something so pitifully entreating in Marian's words, that the old yearning to see her sunny face again came over me, and I felt that go I must. After some demur, my husband consented to take me to Bienne, on condition that my stay should be short; and I wrote to Aunt Thomasine to inform her of my proceedings. Almost by return of post, as I may say, the spirited old lady joined us.

“ Could I miss the opportunity of cheering my

old eyes once more with the sight of her beauty !” cried she : “ and I am sure little Sunshine will be glad to see crusty Aunt Thomasine again.”

Her arrival did not delay us, and, having previously despatched a letter to announce our advent, we set out with a quiet, chastened gladness in our hearts ; and perhaps a hope that we might induce the wanderers to return and live amongst us.

I have often thought since, what disappointments lie in wait for us at every turn of life ; not in our youth only, but in maturer years, when we might have learnt through bitter experience to bear them passively. Yet we do not ; and perhaps it is well : were we to lose our power of suffering, our hearts would lie like stones in our bosoms ; unquickened by any joy, untouched by any trial.

We talked gaily, Aunt Thomasine and I, of little Sunshine’s merry days : we wondered if we should find her changed ; but neither of us could imagine a line to have fallen on her fair brow, or one rose-leaf to have faded from her bright cheek : we saw her in the mind’s eye still blithe and graceful, with her golden locks catching every stray breeze and beam in their silken meshes, and her

blue eyes still as prone to rain or shine at every sudden emotion. And her child—for Marian had a little girl called Ruth, after our mother—what would she be like?—Our fancies quite exhausted themselves here : we could not summon up a vision bright enough to be Marian's child. Alas, how poorly had we prefigured what we were to find !—Oh ! my sister, my darling !—How fully did I understand, when I clasped you closely in my arms, and felt your soft lips and hot tears on my face, the meaning of your urgent entreaty—"Grisell, dear sister, come to me—come to me *soon*."

She was lying on a couch by the window, when Aunt Thomasine and I were taken into her room ; crouched at her feet was a pale, eerie-looking child, with long, dark hair, and black, glowing eyes : she was reading aloud to her mother as we entered, and these words caught our ears, murmured by a clear, silver voice : "Let not your heart be troubled : ye have believed in God, believe also in me." Marian uttered a cry of joy, and started up, with arms outstretched towards us ; the child paused, with finger in the open page, and eyed us shyly.

Oh ! those first moments of meeting, after so many

years, how sad they were! Meeting, as we did, but for one brief heart-clasp on this side eternity.

"Thank God! you are in time," whispered Marian. Aunt Thomasine lingered only for a single kiss; then crept from the room to hide her tears. Alas, it was no longer our little Sunshine of the bright May morning, who greeted us; but a faint raylet lingering on the hill tops, dying in a still, warm twilight, with the roseate flush of love about it!

XXXVII.

It is evening in my sister's chamber; she and I are alone. Harley and Mr Langley (who is just the same as ever) are pacing backwards and forwards on an elevated terrace which overlooks the lake; Aunt Thomasine has gone to her bed-room to bear her trouble alone; and Ruth is quietly sleeping in her cot. The twilight is struggling with a fading crimson on the bosom of the lake, and a sound of distant music comes ever and anon softly on the air. Marian lies watching the clouds

which drift across the blue : she seems lulled by the pleasant mingled tones ; but I hear her murmur as her husband passes the open window in his walk, murmuring in a tone which is a caress : “ Harry’s step : my Harry’s step.”

I sit back in the shadow, and the silence lasts some time. At length, she speaks :—

“ Grisell, come nearer : I want to see your face.”

I do as she wishes, and she shakes her head at the sight of tears I cannot repress. Oh, little Sunshine, I would have bought your life with my own, if I might !

“ Tell me of my mother—of my father ”— she says.

This opens old wounds ; but I talk to her of them freely : how they had spoken of her at the last with perfect love ; how she may meet them in the “ silent land ” with only confidence and trust. As I talk, she grows very quiet, and lets her hand lie still in mine ; and presently her husband enters. The room is so dusk now that I cannot see the smile on her face ; but I *hear* it, in the pleasant tone with which she answers him, when he asks her if she feels stronger to-night.

“ Harry, I shall soon be well,” she says—“ soon *quite* well ! ”—and then there is a sound of quiet weeping, for he knows what she means by *well*.

I go out and leave them together, but am soon recalled, and Mr Langley rejoins Harley in the sitting-room. Then Marian asks me to read to her in the Gospel of St John, where little Ruth had left off. Sitting by the shaded lamp, I read those beautiful chapters : sometimes checked for a moment ; but my own heart is strengthened by the sound of the blessed words, as I go on to the end : “ In the world ye shall have tribulation : but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world.” A long sigh draws me to my sister’s side. She opens her eyes and smiles, then closes them and sinks softly to sleep. Oh ! little Sunshine ! to wake in this weary world never—never more !

XXXVIII.

We remained in Bienne some time, after all was over and my dear sister committed to the dust, be-

cause it was my wish to take charge of Ruth, when Mr Langley, whose old spirit of restlessness had seized him, set out to travel in the East. The world seemed to have become a dreary waste to him after his wife's death : their love for each other had been great indeed, and the void in the life of the one who was left, could never again be filled with any earthly passion. It was impossible to hasten this second separation ; therefore Harley left me with Aunt Thomasine to bring the child, and, being no longer able to defer it, returned alone to England.

Ruth was a strange, incomprehensible child, full of quaint yet innocent fancies, and with but little youthfulness about her : this I afterwards learnt to attribute to the way she had been brought forward by her father, when she had not the wholesome companionship of children of her own age. She made no remonstrance against leaving him, but she felt it most keenly ; and, when we were settled at home, she moped in a manner painful to behold. Nothing roused her, until the advent of a little stranger set the whole house in a commo-

tion; and she at once attached herself to my boy so warmly, that I was almost jealous lest he might learn to love her some day better than me.

Troublous times followed closely on this day of happiness. A commercial crisis was pending, which ultimately brought ruin and poverty on many. It had been an anxious twelve months for us, on several accounts; but the year was not to close till the flood of calamity had swept quite over us, and washed away, in its retiring waters, our pleasant home.

It was not Harley's practice to keep anything from me, in a usual way; but I had begun to observe an anxiety on his countenance for some time back: and when I questioned him, he always put me off with some trifling and unsatisfactory reply. One evening he suddenly announced that he was going to London on business of importance, which might perhaps detain him a week; he bade me not fret, for on his return I should know all. This only served to alarm me the more; but, not to distress him, I hid my fears under an assumed cheerfulness, and tried to think I was disquieting myself for nothing. His absence was longer than he had led me

to expect ; but at last he came. His face warned me at once that there was nothing but bad news to be heard : he looked quite downcast and dispirited. I sent Ruth off to play ; and entreated him to tell me at once what had happened.

“ Grisell, we are ruined ! ” he replied. “ It is of no use to conceal it from you any longer. Our firm has shared the fate of others, and is bankrupt. I have not a hundred pounds in the world that I can call my own. We are totally ruined ! ”

“ Ruined, Harley, while we have credit, and hands, and brains ! ” I exclaimed.

At this moment nurse came in with baby, and Ruth following. I took my darling in my arms, and, the woman being gone, I added : “ And our boy to work for !—No, we are not ruined yet ! ”—He bent over the child to hide his emotion.

“ Oh ! my husband, have I not a right to share ? Tell me all that is troubling you, ” I urged ; thinking from his countenance that he still kept something back.

“ All !—is it not enough, Grisell ? ” he returned.

“ We have our good name left, at least. Let us give up everything we possess and begin again, ”

said I cheerfully. "There is my little fortune, which Hugh doubled when we were married: take that—take all—only let us leave this boy the inheritance of an honest name."

"But can I, ought I, to take that money?—It was settled on you: no creditor can touch it."

"You must," I insisted: "our interests are one. There can be no doubt but that all we have should be given up freely." And so it was agreed.

In the hope of evading this calamity, Harley said he had gone to my brother for a temporary loan; but Hugh could not accommodate him, being himself considerably embarrassed by losses through other houses with which he had connexions.

"But he will weather the storm, and bravely too," said my husband enthusiastically. "He is a fellow of many resources, and he sets himself so steadily to his work. His name, too, stands high amongst business-men. I heard it said, that a man who could afford to give away a fortune must have powers and confidence enough to pull through greater straits than the present one. I think he relishes the struggle: I never saw his eye so full of fire as it was when he told of his difficulties and his extrication from them."

While speaking of Hugh, a momentary forgetfulness of our own position occurred ; but Harley recalled it too soon. He was extremely sensitive, I will not say morbidly so, to popular opinion : he thought far less of the further labour, the fall from luxury to poverty, and consequent privation, in themselves, than he did of what might be thought or said in blame of his conduct.

“ It is not beginning the world again where I began fifteen years ago that troubles me ; but it will be remembered always while I live that I have once been bankrupt : it is a slur on my name and credit as a man of business that will not be forgotten,” he said despondingly. “ We shall be honourably extricated, no doubt : but still the thing can be said.”

I tried to comfort him by anticipations of renewed success, and by calling his attention to the child, who was laughing and pulling at my curls in baby glee, happily ignorant of the ruin that had overtaken his parents. This only suggested more gloomy thoughts.

“ What a break-up there will be amongst us ! this comfortable house to which you came must be exchanged for some poor lodging or cottage, and I

must seek once more a situation as a clerk ; while you, my good Grisell, will have to work harder than ever you did. See to what I have brought you !—penury and toil, to which there is no end.”

“ Courage, Harley !—any place, let it be ever so poor, will be home with you and the children. As for work, I like it : I was not made for an idle lady : I am always the happiest when most closely employed : luxury and ease have not spoilt me yet.”

Certainly they had not. I felt my spirit rise with the occasion, and was as eager to work and wait as I had been when I went up to London with Hugh, as his sole help and guide, more than ten years before. And now, had I not even a stronger incitement in the little creature nestling against my heart, and the husband who loved and trusted me ? Surely I had. Mere pecuniary losses never could annoy me long, my personal wants were so few ; and whilst I had my dear ones about me, I cared little how the storm threatened without.

It was not thus with Harley : every change that our circumstances necessitated added another item to his suffering ; and the very kindness of our friends seemed to grow oppressive to him. At last, to my

surprise, and not a little to my disappointment, he determined that we should leave Edinburgh altogether and go to London, he having received the offer of a situation, through Hugh, in the house of a rising merchant. It was painful leaving all the friends we had gathered about us to begin life anew where we were strangers ; but in this instance I felt that it was not for me to remonstrate, but to submit. Harley must be the bread-winner for the family, and if the change pained him less amongst fresh scenes, it was not for those he loved to plead against it. He had much proud feeling which my heart echoed but faintly. Like those of most women, my thoughts circled within a narrow sphere—home bounded them—while Providence left me that, I heeded nothing beyond.

At this period, little Ruth was a great comfort to me : help, she was too young to be ; but there was a gentle, considerate love in her winning ways that gave balm to my heart often, when any weakness or failing courage oppressed me. Talk and strive as I would, I could not but feel this second start wanted that fervent hope, that confident expectation of success which cheers us on

in our fresh youth ; and Harley felt it more painfully than I. But that strong necessity urged, I might have been tempted sometimes to sit down passively under our misfortunes, and let all go as chance might guide. *Alone*, my strength would have been utterly insufficient for the day of trouble ; but with my child's eyes looking confidingly, lovingly, into mine, and his little hands clasping my neck, my heart dilated with new fortitude, and the momentary weariness was gone.

Aunt Thomasine wrote to us kindly and cheerfully. She doubted not that we should be found equal to every occasion. The excellent old lady had not lost her faith in us : as some do when their relatives and friends fall into misfortune.

A night of pouring rain greeted our arrival in London ; and, though Hugh met us and did his utmost to infuse a spirit of cheerfulness into our party, we took possession of the abode he had provided in a very melancholy and despondent spirit. Had I seen Harley resigned I could have borne up better ; but his health was evidently suffering from his depressed state of mind, and new anxieties agitated me. It was many weeks before he became like

himself again. Men cannot fall into an entirely new routine of duties, as women, from their more pliant natures, can easily. It was very hard for him to become a servant again, after having been for years a master ; and, though he did not complain, I knew the feeling irked him in the most galling way.

At home we did our utmost to prevent our change of fortune from pressing itself on his notice. His salary was very limited, and could afford us but one attendant ; yet, in his daily absences, we contrived to get through all the work, so that when he came home to tea, nothing but quietness, order, and smiles met him : and doubtless he was saved some pain, by never seeing the machinery which produced them. I was happy ; the children did not suffer through the change ; and when I saw my husband gradually restored to strength and spirits, nothing was wanting to my comfort. It is certainly true that externals, short of actual privation, have very little influence on true happiness.

XXXIX.

“ And so you have come once more to live in London : I hope we shall see a great deal of each other,” said Mrs Herbert, on whom I called soon after we were settled. “ And you have had misfortunes, I hear : I am really very sorry, for I do not know anybody who deserves them less.”

We were in the great house in Portland Place : everything that taste and wealth combined could do to beautify it had been done lavishly ; the drawing-room had lost that air of gloomy grandeur which always made it oppressive to me in my Uncle Flinte’s lifetime, and showed plainly that the presiding spirit was gay and luxurious. Mrs Flinte was reclining on a couch, moaning querulously at the east winds, which affected her spirits ; and two little boys were playing on the hearth-rug.

Blanche had recovered her beauty, and with it something of her haughty supercilious manners : adversity had made no indelible impression upon her. We did not get on very well together : we

had few subjects in common, and there always had been a way with my cousin which overbore me. I felt now that her expressions of kindness came from no real cordiality, but were merely conventional phrases ; and I made no long stay. One piece of information, however, I received, which I am free to confess surprised me. I was moving to go, when Blanche begged me to remain a few minutes longer, as she wished to tell me something.

“ I am rather afraid that we have offended Hugh, for he has ceased coming as he used to do,” said she confusedly ; “ and I regret it, for he certainly behaved very well in that matter of my father’s will : much more handsomely than most men would have done under the circumstances.” I observed that I was sorry any disagreement should have arisen ; but I had not heard my brother allude to it.

“ Oh ! you mistake me, Mrs Harley,” Blanche exclaimed ; “ there has been no quarrel whatever ; but a few weeks ago Hugh wished Herbert to advance him a loan for a month or two, and as my husband and I have resolved to keep aloof from all commercial transactions and speculation, on our chil-

dren's account, we felt bound to refuse his request : he seemed greatly annoyed, and he has not called here since. I suppose he must have procured the money elsewhere : I hope so, for he was extremely anxious ; and Herbert remarked at the time he was afraid his affairs were not going well. We might perhaps have lent him a part of it, but we had just been re-furnishing the house, and exchanging the old carriage for a new one of modern build ; and you know our expenses have been heavy—very heavy. I should not like Hugh to imagine himself unwelcome here, Mrs Harley ; and I hope you will tell him so the first time you meet."

"I shall be glad to see him, I'm sure," said my Aunt Flinte, from the sofa. "We always had a high opinion of him, as a steady, plodding, young man, and I hope he will get forward."

This was a long speech for the inert lady to make ; and, promising to deliver all kind messages, I moved towards the door.

"Oh, do let me ring for wine and biscuits ! you have come a long way : and you walk, too !" cried Blanche. I declined any refreshment ; and, though I had gone with a heart glowing with kindness, I

never felt more thoroughly chilled than when I made my escape from that gorgeous drawing-room into the long blank street. It was quite cheering to get back into my own bright little parlour, and to find Ruth waiting for me, and baby ready to warm away the frosty feel with his rosy little kisses. Hugh came in with Harley soon after, and I duly repeated to him Mrs Herbert's message. He reddened slightly.

"It is the fact: I felt both angry and disappointed at the time," said he, "for I scarcely knew on which side to turn; and I did think they would have lent me a helping hand. I fancied I had a right to call on them to do so, and they proved me in the wrong. Never mind, Grisell, it is the way of the world!" But I did mind; for I do not like to see hearts hardened by prosperity, and I thought then, and think still, that the Herberts showed themselves very unfeeling, and forgetful of past benefits, in refusing Hugh what he asked in a moment of emergency. "I have got through without aid," added my brother gaily; "and therefore I am ready to forget my resentment, and will go to make peace with Blanche to-morrow. If I had been

plunged into ruin for want of what I wished to borrow, my feelings would probably be less amicable."

"Well," ejaculated my husband, "I grow disgusted with the world more and more every day."

"It is not worth while, Harley," said Hugh: "the Herberts can be taken as representatives of only a very small part of it, and that not the best. I do not regret the lesson they have given me: it will teach me never to depend on anybody but myself; and, above all, to be distrustful of those on whom I have conferred an obligation."

"Hush!" exclaimed I; "there is no call for railing against the world, from you, brother: it is treating you, on the whole, remarkably well—don't be bitter!"

They both laughed at my admonition, and the subject dropped. If the matter had not come to my knowledge through Blanche herself, I do not think Hugh would have named it: I never heard him allude to it again on any occasion; and on the morrow he went, as he had said, and made peace with Mrs Herbert. She came to see me soon after, and wasted some condolences on our small, inconvenient house; but, from our very different character

and means, no closer intimacy ensued : we were content to go our separate ways without coming in contact.

XL.

Amongst Hugh's best friends was Mr Rivers, the gentleman in whose employment my husband was. He was a person of good family ; but, being the third of five sons, he had been obliged to seek in commerce that independence which his father could not afford to give him. Into all his dealings he contrived to insinuate his old aristocratic notions, however : he was honourable to the last degree, and such a thing as taking advantage in the way of trade probably never occurred to him in his life. It will naturally be imagined that he was not very rich, and that it not unfrequently happened that he was overreached by other men shrewder and less scrupulous than himself. The story of Mr Flinte's will had come to his ears, and, as it chimed in with his principles exactly, he introduced himself to Hugh ; and he it was who gave him the necessary assistance, which the Herberts had not considered it safe

to afford. The old name of Randal finished the good impression, and supported Mr Rivers' antiquated theory of the purest honour running in high blood ; he consequently took Hugh under his protection, as it were, and introduced him to his family. When our misfortunes came, he spontaneously offered to his young friend a confidential position in his office for his brother-in-law, saying that "Harley was a good name—a very respectable name indeed." This pride might excite a smile sometimes, but it was perfectly inoffensive ; for a man more courteous to high and low never existed.

Meeting him one Sunday as we were going to church, he walked on by Harley, conversing with him familiarly ; his daughter he introduced to me, saying, "This is my little daughter, Mrs Harley : Laura, this lady is Mr Randal's sister : " and he left us to improve the acquaintance. Laura Rivers was a tall thin girl of about thirteen, shy and childish in manner, but with a promise of great beauty in her regular features, fine eyes, and innocent expression of countenance. She spoke very little, but what she did say gave me the idea that she

was a sensible, amiable girl, without a shade of forwardness or pretension.

The acquaintance thus commenced did not cease here. Accompanied by an elderly governess, (she had lost her mother several years before,) Laura now and then came to see me; attracted probably by my boy, in whose infantine progress she took wonderful interest. I think it argues well for a girl's disposition when she shows thus early a fondness for young children. Laura had certainly taken the shortest way to my heart by attaching herself to him, and I grew to like her very much. Afterwards she became more reserved, and I thought her proud: but perhaps it was not unnatural, indulged as no doubt she was. About two years later she was sent to school to complete her education, and from that time I ceased to see her, though occasionally I heard of her through Hugh.

The next four years give me but little to relate in any way.

To use Harley's expression, we seemed to have slipped into a very narrow groove of life, in which it appeared as if we were destined to travel smoothly until we came to its end.

With Hugh matters had not progressed so tamely ; he rarely spoke of his own affairs, but we tacitly understood that they were leading on to wealth and independence, and the fruition, at some distant day, of his boldest hopes. His character was now fully matured : his heart and soul were bent on that one narrow point. I do not think he ever undertook any project without first considering whether or no it would ultimately enable him to gain that point with greater speed and facility. Gladly would I have seen some wider human interest creep in and divide his thoughts ; but his heart was fast sealed against all tender fancies :—or so it seemed. I have said elsewhere that Hugh was silent and retentive on such matters ; as indeed he was on most. He could exist with less sympathy and encouragement than any other person I ever knew ; thus his friends were rather amongst his elders than amongst men of his own age.

XLI.

“Grisell, I have discovered Alan !” was my brother Hugh’s unprepared announcement to me

one Sunday evening as he came into the parlour. I uttered a cry of joy : " Found him ! where ? "

" It is a short story, and soon told. I met him in the Park this afternoon, and we had some conversation together : he is a private in a regiment now stationed in London."

" Oh, poor Alan ! " ejaculated I pitifully.

" You need not waste any compassion on him, sister ; he has found the sort of life that suits him exactly. He is a very handsome, dashing fellow, I assure you : he has been at the Cape some years, and he tells me that he hopes his present inactive life will not continue long. Would you like to see him ?—Of course you would. He is waiting outside, for he refused to come in until I had warned you."

I waited for no more, but ran into the street. Alan was close by ; and drawing him into the house, I testified my joy by beginning to cry.

What a great strong man he had grown ! It was well Hugh had met him, and not I, for he would certainly have passed unrecognised ! his imbrowned, moustached face was so very different from that of the beautiful, wilful boy I remembered.

He had to be introduced to Harley, who also had outgrown his memory ; and to my boy Frank, now a turbulent youngster of five years old ; and lastly to Ruth.

“ And Marian—where is she ? ” he asked, looking round as for a face he missed.

“ This is Ruth Langley, our sister Marian’s child : her mother is dead,” said I, drawing the trembling girl to my side. Alan sat down silently : he had expected to find *all* he had left. I was not sorry when Hugh and Harley went out together, and left him alone with me, for I knew he would be more at ease then ; and he had much to learn and to tell. He took little Frank on his knee, and they were speedily the best friends in the world. Alan always had a pleasant way with children : he told him some marvellous stories, to which my boy listened breathless, and summed up his admiration and delight by running up to me, and crying, “ Mamma, I’ll be a soldier ! ”

“ God forbid, my darling ! ” I involuntarily exclaimed, clasping him in my arms. I felt pained to see him go back and climb on Alan’s knee, to hear more of those fascinating stories. When the little ones were gone to bed, we began to exchange

our experiences. I commenced by telling Alan of our parents' deaths : he was much affected, especially when I came to speak of my mother, and the messages she had charged us with, should we ever again meet : he wept almost like a woman, and bitterly repented his conduct towards his father ; although I perceived that a lingering sense of injustice dwelt in his mind.

“ I have never set foot in Burndale since that day,” said Alan, looking into the fire. “ After you were gone out to church, I went into the town and joined one of those players—you may remember them, Grisell—with whom I had concerted a plan of escape the day before. I intended to tell him I had changed my mind, for my mother had talked to me just before, and I felt somehow as if I could bear my father's tyranny better when she was on my side ; but this young man persuaded me from my better purpose. I cannot tell you what arguments he used, even if I would ; but I dare say they were bad enough, for they filled my mind with hard, angry feelings, and made me wish for nothing so much as to get out of sight of home : I did not care then if I never saw it again.” He paused for a moment.

"And afterwards?" said I. He roused himself from the reverie into which he was falling, and went on.

"By daybreak I was twenty miles from Burndale: we walked—the young man I mentioned and I—avoiding the high-roads, for I feared pursuit, and we travelled northwards. I need not tell you of hardships undergone—how we were often in want of a meal and a shelter: you may imagine them: but I did not find the world, on which I had thrown myself, by any means a tender master. I soon tired of the players, and their vagabond life; but having heard of my mother's death, I had no longer any motive strong enough to draw me home, so I found my way to London, where I lived as I could, by any work or any shifts, for seven months: but honestly, sister—honestly always."

"I am glad to know that, brother: go on."

"I am almost at the end now. Failing to suit my fancy in any pursuit that was open to me, I enlisted. My regiment was sent out to the Cape almost directly after, and only returned a month since. We expect to be moved again soon."

"And do you like your present life?"

"Yes: not its quiet side, though; but the stirring, energetic part of it. I have seen some service out amongst those rascally Kaffirs!"

"And you have no wish to leave the army? Hugh, I am sure, would buy"—

"Tut, Grisell! don't name it. My heart's dearest wish now is, that I may 'die in harness!' Besides, sister, what else am I fit for? Leave me as I am: I like nothing so well as my profession."

I looked at him as he sat before me, upright, careless, handsome as ever, and passed in brief review through my mind the things that had been and gone since we parted. I knew that I bore the impress of care on my face; Hugh's countenance was grave always; and here was Alan—light-hearted, happy mortal!—with a smile as cheery as if he had never known a care or a want. If only my mother's eyes could have been blest with a sight of her darling!

"I must write to Aunt Thomasine, and tell her of your return," said I.

"Aunt Thomasine! is the dear old lady living still?"

"Yes; and as brisk at seventy almost as she was at seventeen."

"Ah! I have been a sad disgrace to the family, Grisell. I wonder you don't disown me."

"Nonsense, Alan! let bygones be bygones. That seat by our fireside is yours, brother, whenever you will fill it. To me and mine you are welcome always, remember."

"I shall come most, Grisell, when you are alone: Harley and Hugh are out of my way altogether. While I am talking before them I feel we have no interests in common—that we live in separate worlds. Women's hearts are the only universal sympathizers, and I was sure there would be a corner in yours where the prodigal might find a crumb of comfort, if he ever came back. My mother would have received me the same—I know she would."

"Yes, Alan; there is no doubt of it."

"Poor little Marian! And so that dark-eyed girl is hers? and she is dead!"

"Yes: Ruth is most like her father."

"Marian married that Mr Langley who lived in Watergate, a few doors below us there?"

"Yes, she did."

"What a contrast they must have been! I fancied there was something between you and him?"

I shook my head. "Then I was mistaken. Is Mr Langley dead, that Ruth is with you?"

"We cannot tell. We have had no tidings of him for three years and more. The last letter we had was written just before he started for Egypt a second time, with an intention of trying to discover the sources of the Nile: he has not been heard of since. Harley and I despair of ever seeing him again, but dear Ruth is buoyed up still with hope. She is quite like a daughter to me now, and will be always, if, as I fear, her father is lost to her."

"And the world has always gone smoothly with you, Grisell?"

"I have had my share of difficulties like the rest of us, brother; but they are past now, and we are very happy and content."

"Hugh has the air of a rich man already; but he neither looks nor feels so young as I do."

"No; he works too hard."

"And that soon ages men. Has he still such high notions about restoring his family as he had formerly?"

"Yes; and he will do it!"

"Bravo! he is a glorious fellow! What o'clock

was that? eight? Good night, good night! not a minute to lose!" Snatching a hasty kiss, he was gone, and I stood alone on the hearth.

Could I believe my senses, or was it all a dream? It seemed like one. The lost Alan found!—found, too, under such simple circumstances, when all expectation of seeing him again in this world was gone! so changed in appearance, yet so unchanged in temper! full of penitence and sorrow one moment, the next laughing as if he knew not what regret was! Alan was Alan still, in his best and worst points!

Well, the actual is not often the dramatic. Ah! I did wish my mother had been alive, that she might have welcomed and forgiven him!

XLII.

"Is anything amiss, Harley?" asked I of my husband, one evening on his return from Mr Rivers' office.

"Everything, I think!" was the brief answer. Hugh had come in with him, and the two were

engaged in serious consultation ; so I left them to it, and went out, as it was over nothing I could help in.

A few days later I heard that Mr Rivers was retiring from business, a poorer man probably than when he began it ; but his health would not allow him to attend personally to its concerns, and he had resolved to free his mind from all further anxiety, and be content with what he had. "I have not your brother's energy, Mrs Harley," said he to me : "there never was a Rivers yet who got rich by his own exertions ; and, that I may not leave Laura to the tender mercies of our relations, I choose now to wind up my affairs, lest I should get into difficulties, and leave her quite portionless. She is at home now : you must come to see her."

Accordingly I went. They had removed into a house smaller than that they had previously occupied ; but the evidence of an orderly and elegant presiding genius was visible in all its arrangements. Laura was much grown, and improved in person ; she quite fulfilled her promise of beauty, but her manners were shy and restrained. We talked chiefly of the children at home, and I went away

with the impression that she had become haughty and cold. Speaking of her to Hugh as such, he replied, "Do you think so? she did not strike me as being either." From that day I never heard him mention her name; until one evening, about four months later, he came in alone, and without any preamble said, "Grisell, I am going to be married."

"Married!" I echoed in astonishment, gazing up into his face, which was flushed with a glow of unmistakable happiness, "married!"

"Yes: is it anything so incredible?"

"No; but confess you took me by surprise."

"You don't ask to whom?"

"I can guess—Laura Rivers?"

"Yes." He sat down by the fire, and though my curiosity was most lively, I let him enjoy his own thoughts for some moments undisturbed.

"Well!" I said at length, in the expectation of eliciting further information; but it appeared that none was forthcoming, for he rose, took his hat, and departed as suddenly as he had come, leaving me to reflect at leisure on the unexpected tidings I had heard.

On the morrow I went to see my future sister-

in-law, determined to find in her all those latent charms which Hugh had no doubt discovered; though they had hitherto baffled me.

If she had been chilly before, she was quite unapproachable now. I was shown into her private sitting-room, where she was at work on some embroidery. She rose, gave me her hand, then sat down again, with raised colour, and, as I could not but see, trembling excessively. I never felt more awkward in my life—and I am sure I showed it too—in my way of entering on the subject of my visit: never were such lame congratulations spoken before. Laura received them silently: I feared more than once she was going to cry; but she controlled herself. This was all very mysterious: Mr Rivers was not a man likely to compel his daughter to a marriage against her wishes, neither was Hugh one to take a woman on such terms. I tried to fathom it, and said how much my brother's happiness would be increased by the intended union.

“Do you really and truly think so?” she asked, lifting her pure, limpid eyes to my puzzled face. I thought I had never seen so queer a girl:—why should Hugh have asked her to marry him if *he*

had not been under that impression, at least? I replied that I really and truly did think so. A smile came across her lips, but it did not stay above an instant: her brow, overcast with some unaccountable annoyance, was bent low over her work, and her drooping ringlets hid her cheek; though I knew it was burning, from the clear carmine of her little ear.

Well, thought I to myself, Hugh likes things that give him trouble in a general way, and it seems to me he will have difficulty enough in winning you to make him love you eternally. My impression was, that she did not like Hugh, but had consented to the marriage from some other motive. Her father was poor; my brother was growing rich. I did not know her intimately enough to be certain that this suspicion wronged her, and I felt rather chafed that she should not testify a higher appreciation of Hugh's deserts. I may be excused for thinking that any woman might have been happy in his affection: I thought there was but one man in the world his equal, and not one his superior. My opinion of Laura's judgment fell considerably.

Whilst we were sitting together, only speaking at intervals, and with constraint, Mr Rivers entered.

"Laura," cried he, "Mr Randal is in the drawing-room; he says you are going to the Exhibition of Paintings with us: if so, off with you and get ready;—beg your pardon, Mrs Harley, I did not see you for the screen."

"Papa, I would rather not go."

"Very well, please yourself: another day perhaps?"

"Yes."—And Mr Rivers disappeared.

"Would not Hugh be disappointed?" I ventured to ask.

"No, I do not think he would: Do you?"

"It is most likely; if you promised you would, especially."

"After all, we might go:—no, it is too late—that was the front-door closing, so they are gone."

There was a little tone of regret in her voice as she said this. I do not wonder that women are so often reckoned enigmas, if many resemble Laura Rivers, for she was indeed "uncertain, coy, and hard to please;" and harder still to comprehend.

I called on Mrs Herbert on my way home, as I had to pass her house.

"Really, you are quite a stranger, Mrs Harley," cried Blanche: "if I did not hear of you occasion-

ally through other people, I might imagine you had taken your departure from this world altogether. You have been to see Miss Rivers, I presume ? ”

“ Yes,” I replied.

“ Then it is true, is it, that Cousin Hugh is going to marry Laura ? I have heard it hinted at a dozen times, but I scarcely credited it. She is a delightful girl, and her family is everything we could wish ; but we all agree that Hugh might do so much better in a money point of view : she will have little or nothing, you know.”

“ It does not matter ; my brother has enough for both,” was my answer.

“ Laura is very young : not more than seventeen, is she ? ”

“ No, I believe not.”

“ And Hugh will be ten years older—oh ! a very proper difference !—Still, between you and me, Grisell, he might have done better. I would not tell him so for the world, but *you* might.”

“ I do not think so, if they are mutually attached.”

“ Well, you are right there. Herbert and I went through a great deal in our early married life ; but

there never was a moment in which I wished I had not taken him: no, love carries us triumphantly through hardships of every degree."

I liked Blanche for that speech: it proved that her heart was not all selfishness.

"Of course, Hugh will keep up an establishment on a good scale when they are married," said she in continuation. "Laura Rivers seems to have a taste for society, and she is quite formed to shine in it."

Mystery of mysteries!—Laura formed to shine!—She must have as many varieties of tint in her character as a chameleon has in its skin! Everybody's opinion respecting her differed—which was the true one?

We were invited to spend the evening at Mr Rivers' house soon after this; with the exception of ourselves, it was entirely a family party. I had then an opportunity of remarking those brilliant social qualities of which Mrs Herbert had spoken as characterizing Laura. She possessed a remarkably sweet voice, which had been highly cultivated, and she gracefully complied with every demand that was made upon her to sing; she also seemed very quick and intelligent in conversation: repeatedly her clear

eyes lit up with the sparkle of wit, and I observed that every one paid her a devoted attention. This was in the early part of the evening. Hugh, for some reason which I do not recollect, did not appear until late, and then a perceptible change took place in Laura. She received him stiffly, and to all his remarks seemed only to return brief monosyllabic replies. This was not an affected, coquettish coldness, but evidently proceeded from some uncomfortable feeling of constraint between them. I wondered how Hugh could bear it: but he always had ways and fancies of his own beyond my skill to fathom. At his request, she returned to the piano, permitted him to place certain pieces before her, and sang them as if in obedience to a command. Her cheek flushed whenever she spoke to him, and her eye never met his willingly. "I am persuaded she does not love him," said I to myself as I left the house that night; but the next day I was half-tempted to revoke my opinion.

Laura came to see me, and as I was alone; she sat upwards of an hour, and at length fell into her former natural, warm way of speaking.

"I like an enthusiastic character," said she earnestly. There is nothing for which I feel a deeper

contempt than an objectless, idle life, frittered away in pleasure and amusement. I like to see a man's whole heart and soul in his work."

That is exactly Hugh's life, thought I; yet you do not seem to take a vital interest in him.

"You will make Hugh too ambitious," I remarked: by no means sure how the observation would be taken. She started and flushed deeply.

"Oh no; he never speaks to me of his aspirations!" she exclaimed, in a tone of what sounded very like annoyance: "perhaps he thinks me too young and childish; or that I could not understand them."

"He was always of a reserved temper," I said in reply.

"I can easily imagine that: yet he tells papa of his hopes and his difficulties: even Mrs Herbert too; and I daresay you know all his dreams and thoughts."

"No, indeed; and many that I do know, I have only divined," I answered; not quite decided whether this little jealousy arose from love or pique.

"Mr Randal thinks me very trifling, I am sure;

he always talks to me about trifles and amusements. I should like it much better if he would tell me something of the deeper interests of his own life," she said sadly. Then, with a burst of passionate feeling, the existence of which I had not so much as suspected, she exclaimed: "Mrs Harley, I shall never be happy with him, for I am sure he does not love me—I am certain he does not love me!—I wish he would leave me, while it is time."

I was perfectly amazed, though my doubts as to her feelings were quite set at rest by this outbreak; and, much as I disliked the position in which she placed me by it, I thought it right to endeavour to convince her of her mistake.

"Laura," said I gravely, "if Hugh had not loved you, and felt, besides, that you were essential to his happiness, certain am I that he would never, never have sought you for his wife. I am convinced that you *more* than divide his thoughts with what has been all his life through his dearest ambition."

"Oh, if I could think so!" she exclaimed.

"Never doubt it, Laura."

"But you do not know how it was we were en-

gaged: I did not know at the time," she said blushing to her very brow, while the tears rushed to her eyes. "Papa offered me to Mr Randal—not exactly *offered*, perhaps, but gave him to understand that he should prefer him for a son to any one: and then Mr Randal asked me, and I consented."

"Well," said I, with a coolness that calmed her somewhat, "it would have been presumption in a man like Hugh, risen as he is from the middle class, to aspire to you without any encouragement. Be sure, his own heart had long suggested what your father gave him license to ask; and no doubt he had seen it: Hugh would have been too proud to run any risk of rejection."

"Then I feel I am not equal to him: what am I, or what have I, that he should have sought me if papa had not done as he did? What do I bring him? I know it is said that he might marry better."

"You bring him," said I, "the richest of dowers—a pure, fresh heart. If you had all the wealth of the Indies, without that you would be poor in his sight. If he be still reserved, remember it is his disposition. Trust him, and he will soon show you

more of his inner heart than he has ever shown to any other, because he loves you."

I felt persuaded of this while I spoke. I was sure Hugh would look for in his wife something nobler than a beautiful toy: that she would be in the fullest sense of the words his bosom-friend.

Laura sat a while silent after this. I tried in vain to decipher the thoughts which cast flitting shadows over her face as they swept through her mind:—usually her countenance was transparent; now it baffled me. Looking up suddenly, she caught my gaze fixed upon her.

"Mrs Harley, you have brought him up, you know all his feelings," she began—

"No—there is no one who does that—no one!" I interrupted.

"He will be disappointed in me: I feel he will, and then I shall be in that wretched position of a wife who never knows her husband's heart. I have seen some such, and oh, how I have pitied them! I could not bear to think that Hugh would not share his hardships with me as well as his enjoyments: that he might deceive lest he should pain me: that would be the sharpest pain of all!—Yet you are sure he loves me?"

"Has he never told you so?" said I, half-amused at her confessions. She glanced up with a beautiful, rosy flush on her face, and smiled, but did not speak.

"Of course, he has a hundred times," I added: the blush deepened, and the deep eyes glittered ominously: "yet you doubt him."

"It is myself I doubt, lest he should weary of me: I would have all or nothing. Mrs Harley, did no such fears agitate you?"

"No, I had faith in my husband. Neither did I look for a fond idolatry, but for a steadfast love which would stand the wear and tear of life: and ours *has* stood it well. I will tell you, Laura, every year that passes over leaves me happier and fuller of a calm content than it found me: indeed my heart is content in every way. And Hugh is Harley's equal. You know his high reputation amongst men of his own standing, and I can fearlessly assert, that a finer heart never beat than his! Laura, some would say that it is on your side love is wanting."

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed, with eagerness: no;—if it had been, my answer would not have been what it was. I could never give my hand without

my heart; and is it so strange that I should wish to have his in return?"

"Well, it *is* yours."

"Ah! *you* say so!" she said: but there was a softer, pleasanter tone in her voice, as if she more than half-believed it. "You will think me a very singular girl, Mrs Harley," she added, blushing; "but I have no mother to go to, no sister, no anybody!"

"There will presently be Hugh: I have found him a very kind consoler often," returned I, smiling.

"You are laughing at me!" she cried.

"No, indeed; but I am afraid you have been reading romances, and that you are going to invent troubles and difficulties:—don't do it, Laura; it is not wise: there are always plenty to come without our seeking."

"That is true," replied she, pressing her hand on her burning cheeks. "I think you send me away happier than I came."

"I am glad of that: real love casts away doubt," said I, kissing her.

"Promise me one thing," she whispered, holding

me fast; "promise you will not repeat to Hugh a word of what I have said to you."

"I promise faithfully."

"Then good-bye, *sister*;" and kissing me once more, she went away.

XLIII.

"Harley you must spare Grisell to me for a week: I want her to go down to Burndale with me to see Aunt Thomasine," said Hugh, in a decisive tone.

Little Frank raised a pitiful cry of remonstrance, and my husband looked astonished; he was on the point of asking "Why," when a significant glance from Hugh checked him. I could not tell what it meant, and as there seemed some secret intelligence between them, I asked no questions.

"The day after to-morrow, Grisell, we start.—I'll return her to you, Harley, safe and sound, within the seven days: Frank, my boy, be quiet," and thus speaking my brother went out. We had not seen Aunt Thomasine since Marian's death,

though she had repeatedly wished us to go down into Yorkshire, and therefore I arranged to take Ruth with us; Frank was to be left at home in charge of papa.

It was then the beginning of harvest, and having travelled by coach to within twelve miles of Burndale, we took a chaise for the remainder of the way. Hugh at first was thoughtful, but by and by he began to speak, asking me if I remembered having made such and such remarks when we had driven that road on our first going up to London; his memory proved much stronger than mine, and besides I was wondering how we should find dear Aunt Thomasine, and thinking how glad she would be to see us.

There are some very steep hills on the road to Burndale, and we got over the ground but slowly; mounting one of them, we had a full view of Thorney Old Hall opposite; its rows of windows gleamed in the setting sun, and its gray walls stood out distinctly against the woods behind. Hugh looked at it intently for some minutes, and then leaning back in the chaise, with his hand over his eyes, spoke no more, until the horses were painfully

mounting the steep road which wound up under the enclosure wall of the Thorney pleasure grounds.

I was gazing at the fine old place, marvelling in my secret heart whether my dear brother's ambition would ever be realized concerning it, when the carriage drove in at the wide open gates ; at the same moment, Hugh bent forward, and looking under my bonnet, whispered : " Dreams, Grisell, dreams ! "

The whole truth flashed into my mind at once : " Randal of Thorney ? " said I.

" Yes : Randal of Thorney once more. "

Standing under the porch was Aunt Thomasine. Even at this proud moment, I had time to feel, that in the dignified welcome she gave us, the old, genial, homely warmth was wanting. I had never been within those walls before, and my first impression was of chill and damp. Hugh took my hand and led me into a great dining-parlour, over the chimney-piece of which I instantly recognised my ancient friend, Pierce Randal.

" But for you, sister, I should never have been master of Thorney, " said he : " you have my lasting gratitude : I owe all to you. "

"Not all, brother. Most to your own courage, perseverance, and good faith."

"And he will prove a worthy representative of our name," added Aunt Thomasine, with a dignity worthy of the old Miss Grisell Randal, who had sold the place to save her brother's honour. All this time, Ruth Langley had been standing by me in awed silence: at last she took courage to whisper; "Whose house is this?" Aunt Thomasine replied:

"It belonged to your great-great grandfather; now it is your Uncle Hugh's. I feel quite at home," she added, in a lower tone, turning to me.

I am sure I should not have imagined it, had not the dear old lady made the assertion, for I never saw her look less so. She had purchased for the occasion a stiff black-brocaded silk that rustled at her every movement; her cap was made of some antique lace, which, from its tint, might have been in the family for generations; and a rich old-fashioned pelerine covered her shoulders. No figure could be more different than that she now presented, from her ordinary one, clad in lilac muslin, with snowy cap, neckerchief and apron of fine net. She had, I am persuaded, taken for her model an old portrait of the good Miss Grisell, which adorned one panel

in this dining-parlour; and she made a very exact copy of it, in all excepting the height: for Aunt Thomasine was rather short of stature.

We had tea early, and sat talking a short while after it: then Hugh proposed that I should go over the house with him; Aunt Thomasine volunteered her services as guide, and Ruth brought up the rear, reluctant to be left behind in the gloomy parlour. We went across the hall, which was open to the roof, and had a gallery running round it; it was lighted only by one high window of stained glass, and was consequently anything but cheerful. Aunt Thomasine expatiated luxuriantly on its fine oak carvings, and called upon me to observe the painted coats of arms in the compartments of the window.

"Mr Nevil displaced nothing," she added: "he had not been bitten by that mania for improvement which alters everything, how highly consecrated soever it may be by antiquity, or beauty, or association. And Hugh has bought the house as it stands: furniture, pictures; all in fact."

We passed into the great drawing-room: here the fittings and decorations were modern, but decaying through neglect.

"All that was in this room, in Miss Grisell's time, is stowed away in the lumber-room at the top of the house," whispered Aunt Thomasine; "there are many objects of interest that belonged to her: we must examine them to-morrow."

Beyond this was a second room, smaller but corresponding in its arrangements with the first; it opened into a third, where were piles of huge books heaped up against the walls. On looking at these, I saw that time, and probably mice, had been busily at work amongst them. I read a few names on their dusty backs, such as Rhymer's *Fœdera*, "Froissarte's Chronical," and Journals going back to 1500.

"These were all here in Squire Ralph's day: Mr Nevil used a small room as a library;" explained our well-informed guide.

Leaving the smell of dust and damp, which had made so free with Pierce Randal's possible books, we went down a corridor lighted by a narrow window, almost overgrown with creepers outside.

"This room has never been used since Squire Ralph died in it," said my aunt, opening a door close by this window. We followed, and found ourselves in the east room, the legend of which had

chilled my blood, and made my heart beat heavily when I was a child : it had not quite lost its effect, even yet. The shutters, so long closed, were now thrown open, and the twilight made it look mysterious in its dim, remote corners. A long table stood in the midst of the floor, whereon still lay the colourless, shattered carpet, which had never been removed. Heavy chairs, covered with dark leather, stood about, as if a party of guests had risen from them hastily and no hand had ventured to range them in order against the wall. Ashes were in the wide grate, and pictures, many of them faded and indistinct, still hung in their places. One over the chimney-piece attracted me, and I advanced to look at it more nearly. It represented a young man in the bloom of youth, richly dressed in coat of purple velvet, and with long hair flowing down his collar.

“Ralph Philip Randal,” murmured Aunt Thomasine. “The date is 1709. It was painted just before his first marriage : you will see his wife’s portrait up stairs.”

Hugh advanced to the windows, and with difficulty opened one of them ; his action seemed to say : “There must be no ghost-room in a house

where I am master :—let the sunshine and the breath of heaven come in.”

Aunt Thomasine felt it apparently as an innovation on the ancient traditions of the family, for with a solemn voice she said, pointing to a great chair which stood at the head of the table: “In that chair, Squire Ralph died; on the table, when they found him, were scattered papers, letters, and deeds; in his hand was a crushed miniature, and on the carpet at his feet, a small broken phial. This is all that is known of his death.”

Little Ruth clung fast to my hand, and somewhat awed by the circumstance which all about so vividly recalled, we stole out of the room, almost unconsciously speaking to each other in whispers.

Returning across the hall, Aunt Thomasine assumed her most important air; I marvelled what we were to see next. She led the way through a swing-door, down another long passage, and admitted us into an octagon-shaped apartment, having a high narrow window in three of its sides; the middle one served also as a door, and was at the time standing open; through it poured the softened light of the setting sun.

"This was the good Miss Grisell Randal's own private room," said my aunt, sitting down in one of the faded chairs to rest; "but I do not think there is much left here that she had in use, because Mrs Nevil occupied it herself."

There were several portraits of children hung in the panels—for all the rooms were wainscoted—one of which I recognised as the unhappy young man who had been Hugh's friend. Hugh observed it also, for he turned hastily away, and passed out into the garden through the open window.

"Let us defer the remainder of the examination until to-morrow," I suggested; my aunt agreed, as it was growing dusk, and excusing herself from accompanying me into the garden, she returned to the dining-parlour, taking Ruth with her. I followed Hugh, whose figure I saw at a distance in the grounds.

They were no better than a wilderness now. Weeds, shrubs, and untended flowers were all tangled together in inextricable confusion; they had encroached on the pathways, and in many places almost blocked them up. With difficulty I made my way to my brother, who, not perceiving me, was going on and on; I overtook him at last,

just as he was ascending some broken stone steps which led up to an elevated terrace commanding the valley, and from which a most beautiful and extensive view was to be obtained.

"Aunt Thomasine inclines to the belief, that this walk is still haunted by the unquiet spirit of our ancient kinswoman," said my brother as, arm in arm, we paced along the terrace: "I see it will not do to treat her traditions with contempt, and yet I should wish to dismantle that octagon room completely: it would make such a pretty nest for Laura—do you not think it would?" I replied that it certainly would.

"And the flower-gardens coming close up to the windows will charm her: the prospect, too, is prettier from that room than from any other." Hugh went on talking and planning, but every word and every project had some reference to Laura. I wished she could have heard him: no plea to doubt his love could have been left her.

"And do you intend to settle here entirely?" I asked.

"Oh, no! that is impossible *yet*," replied my brother, shaking his head: "I have got only the walls of our ancestors *now*—their acres are still to

be earned. The place was to be sold, and I could not bear to let it go into strange hands; so I shall fit up a few rooms, put the gardens into order, and we will come down to Thorney for a part of the year. Aunt Thomasine has volunteered to give up her pleasant cottage and live here always: she will find it dreary in winter, I am afraid; but she proudly asserts that she would rather live with the owls, where Miss Grisell Randal lived, than amongst nightingales elsewhere: and I believe her."

"Yes, there is not a doubt of it: she has such a keen relish for antiquities; and here is enough to flatter her taste," said I.

As we paced the terrace backwards and forwards, there came sweeping up the valley a sound of distant bells; they were those of Burndale. For a few minutes we stood to listen.

"Ah!" said Hugh, smiling; "poor Alan liked nothing better than ringing those bells when we were boys at school."

The sun had now entirely disappeared, but presently, like a ball of lurid fire, rose the moon over the ridge of Thorney Scaur; the wind got up too, and the air began to feel chill, so we left the ter-

race, and descending to the gardens, walked along the front of the hall to the entrance. Hugh paused at one point.

“It was just here,” said he, “that I stood when Mr Nevil so haughtily ordered me from his grounds. How little did either of us think then, that the day would come when I should stand here again as Master of Thorney : ‘poor John!’”

It is not often that men see the fruition of their hopes of fortune until life is on the wane : until the shadows begin to wax long on their path, and the hoar-frost of painful experience lies thick upon it. With Hugh the Fates had dealt more kindly ; this silently cherished ambition of his grave youth and earnest manhood was accomplished while he was yet in the pride and flush of existence. There was still much to do,—much, it might be, to endure—but the beginning was made : the nucleus of the old possessions was regained. These thoughts were in his mind as we stood silently for a little space under the porch.

XLIV.

Returning to the dining-parlour, we found it brilliantly lighted and a bright fire blazing in the wide grate. Aunt Thomasine reclined on a couch : she had not got her knitting, and from her fidgetiness, I am sure she felt the want of something to do besides looking stately. Ruth sat near her in a high-backed chair, and I have no doubt that the interval of our absence had been beguiled by the narration of some of the Thorney traditions, for the poor child was white and scared, and on no pretence could she be induced to go to bed until I did.

Hugh flung himself into an arm-chair, and soon, forgetful of our presence, fell into a delicious reverie. Somewhat weary myself, I sat down opposite, and with the exception of an occasional remark from Aunt Thomasine, we all enjoyed the luxury of idleness and our own thoughts. Mine were busy chiefly with my brother : his face was always an interesting study to me. Its lines had deepened of late years ; here and there, too, amongst the dark waves

of his hair, I could detect a white thread. These changes, slight though they were, had given to his countenance a singular likeness to Pierce Randal's portrait : but for the dissimilarity in dress, it might have passed for his. Yet how different their lives must have been, save in the steadfast earnestness of purpose which brought the one to his death and the other to the fruition of his proudest hopes.

No grave thoughts, however, were in Hugh's mind then ; I knew as well as if the soft name had come murmured from his lips, that he was dreaming of Laura :—of the fair young wife who was to make the sunshine of his life in this old home of his forefathers. Presently he rose and paced the room backwards and forwards ; but so wrapt in his sweet fancies, that he did not hear Aunt Thomasine's disapprobative groan, when her nap was broken by his step on the creaking floor : he must have been absorbed, for it was not like him to be neglectful of others. We were all brought back from dreamland by the entrance of a servant with supper : Aunt Thomasine thought it necessary to apologize for this.

“ To-morrow, if you prefer it, Hugh, we can dine

late—I daresay in Squire Ralph's time the Randals always did," said she: "I remember Miss Grisell never ate supper."

My brother was thinking of something else, and carelessly answered that she might make any arrangements she preferred; but I could not help smiling at my dear old aunt, whose habits all her life through had been so simple, now wishing to conform, in the minutest particular, with what she imagined to have been the rules of the house in former times. In visiting at Thorney, it was evident that our old home-customs must be left behind, while she ruled: but she was very happy, and I could excuse her aristocratic tendencies when she put her withered hands on Hugh's head and blessed him, while the tears rose in her eyes: "God bless you, my dear, good nephew," she said, in a trembling tone: this is the proudest evening of my life! I shall sleep under the roof beneath which our ancestors slept for centuries; and now that I have seen the Randals restored, I care not how soon I lay my bones in the vault by those of good Miss Grisell."

XLV.

"You ought to go over to Burndale to see the Larkes," said my aunt the next morning. "Hugh, the Doctor knows you are down here, and the poor old man will be disappointed if you forget him."

"I will certainly go before we return to town," said my brother.

"How is Mary?" I asked.

"She is as gay as ever: I never knew a more animated woman; and her children, lively, noisy little creatures, are just like her. Mr Close is quite the man to suit her, for he is still and silent; and they appear most happy together, though such a contrast."

Mary had married, soon after I did, one of the masters at the Grammar School, and her father now lived with them. At first I remember being disappointed in her for so speedily fulfilling Hugh's prophecy, and forgetting him; but she was certainly not formed to pine in melancholy all her life, and she only acted as I might have expected, from what I knew of her character, in marrying when she did.

Accordingly, following Aunt Thomasine's suggestion, we went to see her and the Doctor. I found a cheerful, placid, matronly woman, where I recollected only a lively girl. Her beauty had matured, but not decreased : hers was indeed a truly lovely face : clear, expressive, and tender, without one trace of care on the smooth open brow, or the fresh, delicate lips : she was far prettier than formerly, and a thorough woman in all her ways and affections. She spoke of her husband (who seemed to me an insignificant, handsome person) as the noblest, cleverest, most talented man in the universe ; not excepting even her father : her devotion to him was pleasant to see, and so also was her fondness for her children. Her heart travelled round and round within this narrow sphere of home, brightening, and exalting, and beautifying all it touched with its warm, tender love. Her laugh was the very echo of music, and her voice sweetness itself. I liked to listen to it, though it only sang one song—the praises of her husband, her children, and her father. I felt rather annoyed at Aunt Thomasine's remark, as we left the house : “ Mary is a kind, unaffected creature, but there is

no exalted feeling about her. It is rather absurd to see her glorify that mild, dull husband of hers as she does : but I dare say she is happy, and that is the utmost any of us look for in this world—each to be happy after our own fashion. Mr Close would exasperate me beyond endurance.”

I could not help thinking, that if the independent old lady had ever had any of those domestic ties about her, even her spirit might have been tamed ; but I said nothing, neither did Hugh, who was remarkably silent, even for him, as we drove back to Thorney.

Coming in sight of the church, my aunt proposed that we should get out of the chaise, and go in. There was an old man sitting under the porch, waiting, as he told us, for a funeral ; and finding that he was the sexton, we asked him to admit us : he looked at my brother intently, and inquired if he was the new squire. Hugh nodded ; and he then, growing communicative, told us that there had been no doings while Mr Nevil and his father were at the Hall such as had been in old Squire Ralph's time. I did not think the comparison he forced upon our recollection redounded particularly

to the honour of our progenitor ; but when he came to speak of my grandfather, Percival Randal, I listened with interest. He said no boys could be more different than the brothers were from first to last : he added further, that he had heard it said by his mother, who was maid to Miss Grisell, that she had been a gay, handsome lady in her youth, and was once to have been married to a soldier, Lord d'Arley, but he was killed in a duel that he fought with another gentleman who had courted her also. How strange these old stories sounded to us, who were standing above her senseless dust !

There was a slab of gray marble let into the wall, which bore the following inscriptions : " Geoffrey Philip Randal, aged forty-five. Grisell Randal, aged ninety-six." No date, or further words. I looked round for some memento of Squire Ralph, and discovered a plain tablet similar to the other. Some of the older monuments were very elaborate, and several very ancient. Pierce Randal's was in the chancel, and had a long piece of Latin highly extolling his scholarship.

" I could spend days and weeks in this place," whispered my aunt enthusiastically. So could not

I : my heart was more closely bound to the living present, its joys and its cares, than to the dead past with its memories and its pride. "The vault is full, or nearly so," said the sexton : "there won't be space for more than one other coffin over the last that was put in." Aunt Thomasine started, and glanced anxiously at Hugh : we understood her.

"That place shall be yours," said Hugh : "as for me and mine, we will lie outside, where the sun and the rain and the wind can beat upon us as they do in life : I could not sleep with that weight of stone upon me." The old lady thanked him for this promise, and I do believe she felt happier, for she said to me afterwards, "You see, Grisell, I am the only one left of the last generation, and it almost seems as if I had a right to that place ; though it is very generous in Hugh to give it up to me." "I hope it will be very many years before you claim it, aunt," returned I.

"Well, my dear, I hope so too : I am quite willing to live out my days ; but you must remember I am fast coming to the time when life becomes but labour and sorrow." She rejoined solemnly : "Still

I hope to see Hugh married, and with sons and daughters rising around him, so that the old race may have a prospect of long continuance in the land. Yes, I should wish to see that before I die."

XLVI.

I had seen quite enough of the gloomy state of Thorney old Hall, when the day arrived for my return home. Home! what a pleasant sound that is! I know no music that can equal it. Sitting round the fire in the dining-parlour, my mind's eye used to travel away to another hearth, where my seat was empty, and I knew everybody missed me. I could fancy I heard little Frank asking, "When is mamma coming back? oh! I wish mamma were at home." It may be selfish, but I always like to feel that my absence from those I love leaves a void.

Aunt Thomasine saw us go with regret; but she would soon be consoled, for under her supervision all the changes which were then to be made in the Hall were to be carried out. Hugh drove with me

to my own door when we got back to town, but he declined to go in, for he wished to get to Mr Rivers' house early, lest Laura should be going out. My boy's rosy face was perched up in the parlour-window to keep watch for us, and as soon as the fly stopped, he came bounding to meet us.

"Papa has not come in yet, but Uncle Alan is here, mamma; and we have all wanted you so much," cried he, springing up into my arms. I carried him into the parlour where Alan was, and though we were not alone, I could not repress a few quiet tears over little Frank. It was the first time we had ever been separated before, and the eager warmth of his welcome kisses quite overpowered me.

"I have got a gun and a sword and a drum, mamma, since you went away," he said, settling down on my lap, after the first exuberance of joy was passed; "and Uncle Alan says I shall make a fine soldier!" I shook my head at my brother, who delighted in what he termed the lad's spirit; for he had promised me not to encourage this martial inclination in my darling.

"Foolish fears, Grisell: let him have his way," returned he, laughing. "Shall I show you my

gun, mamma?" asked the little fellow, slipping down on the carpet. Presently he came to me, fully accoutred in his military weapons. "Papa gave me the sword and the drum, and Uncle Alan brought me the gun: listen, mamma, it goes off!" I think there is a natural turn for destruction in minds masculine; Frank's was developing itself early: Uncle Alan with his wondrous stories made much of my pacific teaching of none effect. While the child was exhibiting his treasures my husband entered; so Ruth carried her young playmate off to their nursery, and we were left to exchange our experiences of the past week in peace and quietness.

When Mr Rivers retired from commercial affairs Harley had been thrown out of his situation, which he had not found it easy to replace; and of course this was matter of great anxiety to us; for, since our misfortunes, we had always found it impossible to get much beforehand with the world. Hugh would willingly and gladly have given him the post of his own head-clerk, but my husband would not accept it; he would rather serve any man than a relation. During my absence, however, he had

met with a situation, though one of much less emolument than that he had held before. I did not murmur, for I had discovered long ere this that it is not in a multitude of luxuries that happiness is to be found ; and while Harley's simple tastes were gratified, I felt nothing a privation. I hoped still that we might give the children good educations, and enable them thus to make their own way in life ; and beyond that I had not a care.

XLVII.

Some months elapsed, and I heard no further mention of my brother's marriage. At first I observed no change in him ; by and by he became restless, and sometimes even moody. Laura had gone away from London on a visit to her father's relatives, and her return was delayed week after week until Christmas was over. To my inquiries when the wedding was to take place, I only got for answer : " I cannot tell : not yet."

Mrs Herbert called on me.

" Ah !" said she, " Miss Rivers is a pretty co-

quette: I hear *such* stories of her proceedings down at Alderbeck! She is so admired, that it will be a marvel if her little head is not turned. Hugh will have enough on his hands, I tell him, when he gets her to manage."

"Be careful, Blanche, how you sow any distrust between them," replied I, jealous for my brother.

"I would not make mischief for the world; but, between you and me,—it need not go any farther, mind,—Hugh might have made a much better choice. Laura is scarcely more than a child: she had seen nothing of society before they were engaged: her father brought the affair to a climax by premature interference. Altogether, I should not be surprised, and you need not regret, if the match be broken off entirely."

"Have you any reason for thinking that such is likely to be the case?" I asked.

"Well, not exactly: Hugh says nothing: he is dissatisfied and uncomfortable, but he keeps silence. However, I may tell you, in confidence, what Laura's cousin Grace writes to me: she says Laura is rather ashamed of her trading lover!"

"I don't believe that!" I exclaimed indignantly.

"I am sure he would show to infinite advantage amongst the triflers with whom she is surrounded now : and, what is more, Laura thinks it."

"Perhaps she may : but, at all events, she does not make it known ; for Grace tells me that she receives marked attentions from a Captain Martin, and that she cannot bear to be bantered about Hugh Randal—she almost quarrelled with her cousin about it."

"That is not impossible, if they spoke slightly of him," said I.

"Well, if you like to take that view of the case, do so : I wish it may be the true one."

"I have no doubt that it is," I replied ; for I was resolved not to give Blanche an inkling of the disquiet she had caused me.

About a week after this conversation Laura returned home, accompanied by the cousin Grace of whom Mrs Herbert had spoken. I received the information from Hugh, who came down to me on the evening of their arrival. "You have seen Laura?" I asked. "Yes," he replied, throwing himself back in his chair with a gesture of weariness and impatience ; "I saw her for five minutes."

"She was going out, then?"

"I suppose so; but she did not say where, neither did I ask, for they were in haste: she has brought a Miss Gay back with her—a cousin, I believe."

"Grace Gay—yes, I have heard of her: what is she like?"

"I did not observe."

There was no misunderstanding the expression of Hugh's countenance: something had certainly occurred to make him very angry. There was a suppressed glitter in his shaded eyes, and a stern compression of his lips, that I knew full well.

"Are you not well, brother?" I asked.

"I am ill at ease, Grisell: in short, I have done a foolish thing. I had better have been ice and adamant to the end!" he replied in a low, bitter tone: "far better than have placed honour and happiness in the hands of a girl! She cares nothing for me, Grisell—nothing in the world; or she could not have received me as she did. They have done her no good at Alderbeck: I wish she had never gone there."

"Do nothing rashly."

"Rashly, Grisell! these things are best done at once. A wife whom I must watch would make

the misery of my existence : I have been mistaken in her."

"She is such a child yet," said I; "her mind is susceptible of impression easily; make her your own, and you can mould her as you will: her nature is pure and true."

"That won me: that guileless, innocent face won me! Yet, Grisell, I cannot—I will not suffer her to trifle with me as she would with some men. I will not be a slave—an infatuated fool, even for the woman I love!" He rose and paced the floor for some minutes, chafing inwardly at the remembrance of the mortification to which Laura had subjected him.

"Grisell, what do you counsel me to do?" he asked suddenly, stopping short opposite to me. I looked up in his face, darkened with pain and anger.

"Follow the dictates of your own heart, brother: be patient with her, for both your sakes," said I gently.

"Listen, Grisell: it was surely neither right nor kind in her to leave my letters one after the other unanswered for two months; and on the day of her

return home to give me only five minutes, and that grudgingly. Can she love me? And if she do not, is it not just that I should let her go?"

"I am afraid," said I, "that you are playing a game at cross purposes."

"For a few weeks before she went to Alderbeck I saw none of this caprice. She seems quite a different character now. Grisell, this is no trifling stake for which I play: it is for happiness or misery; almost for life or death! If I wrench her from my heart, all its best hopes go with her; she has grown so closely amongst them ever since she was a child!—so pure, so good, so affectionate, she was always!"

"And is still," I rejoined. "Consider well, brother, before you condemn her: listen to no voice but her own. Go to her to-morrow; tell her how she has pained you: above all, make her feel what she is to you. I am much deceived in her, if she make not ample confession and amends."

Hugh heard me silently. The indignation had died out of his keen eyes, but the tortured expression still made his fine lip quiver from time to time. He loved this strange, capricious girl with all the

passion and tenderness of his ardent nature ; but there was a jealous sense of honour kept them in check, and a strong, remorseless pride that would quench life itself rather than let them have the mastery. He sat for a short time without speaking; during those minutes, many agonizing thoughts passed through his mind, as I knew from the quick contraction of his brow and the dilating of his eyes.

“ Grisell, I have taken my resolve,” he said suddenly, speaking with evident effort: “ Laura shall either marry me at once, or I will set her free.” The last words cost him much ; they came hoarse and broken from his lips. He rose as he spoke, and grasped my hand with a convulsive strength that almost made me shriek with pain : nothing could have betrayed more plainly the inward torture he endeavoured to conceal.

“ You shall see me to-morrow night,” he replied in answer to my entreaty that he would not leave me in suspense. “ Whether it be ill or well with me, Grisell, I will not fail *you*.”

I turned back into the house with tears in my eyes. Nothing could pain him without touching me to the heart : we had been together through so

many cares, and pleasures too, that our feelings seemed moved by one spring.

The morrow passed, but Hugh did not appear; it was not until the third day that I saw him again.

“Well, Grisell, you are going to ask me what I have been about to forget you so long,” said he quietly.

From this commencement I augured well. They are friends again, thought I. For a few minutes he sat perfectly silent, as if he were bracing himself up to some strong effort. My hopes fell. At length, he continued in a voice, unnatural from its cold, passionless calm:—

“I did not see Laura until this morning, for she was always out when I called; but to-day I was admitted and found her alone. Grisell, there is nothing to be gained by going through it again: it is enough that all is over between us.”

I could make no reply—could offer no comfort: there was that in his compelled calm that forbade it. His countenance did not betray him now: only in his deep, measured, forced tones could I detect the echo of the agony he hid. Unquestioned, after

a pause he began to speak again, endeavouring, I think, to convince himself that his suffering was neither great nor strange.

“ I am not the only man who has outlived his youth, to make at last a grand mistake,” said he : “ Not the first, by many thousands, who has believed that to be true for which he hoped. Yet I did think Laura loved me. I am older than she is by ten years—perhaps I am grave even beyond that!—Well, no matter now, it is over!”

“ It is over!”—How much was contained in those three simple words : how many sweet, tender fancies and proud hopes they annihilated ;—how much of the glow they swept from the future ;—how blank and colourless they made the present !

These still, silent natures, that can philosophize, and almost smile over their tortures, are an enigma to me. They remind me of dark, fathomless inlets between high rocks, which reflect no shadows, because they are always so shaded : into whose abyss you may cast a stone, and listen in vain for its reverberation in the hollow depths : over which you may muse, wondering what sea-caves, carpeted with glossy, tressed weed, lie far, far below, hiding,

perchance, fragments of wreck and white shining bones in their gloomy mystery.

“It is over!”—That was the stone that made a momentary eddy as it cleft the waters, which instantly closed over it in deadly calm. I might have watched the cold face of my brother for an hour after he had thus spoken, yet neither lip, nor eye, nor brow, would have told me one of the secrets in his heart. He talked of our everyday concerns: of Harley and the children; and of Alan, whose regiment was under orders for Malta. Presently my husband came in, and they began to speak of political changes which were then agitating the continent of Europe. I sat by, marvelling how Hugh could pin his mind down to these general interests at such a moment, and discuss them in all their bearings as coolly as he was doing. He remained with us until late, as if his stern heart scorned the ease and repose of solitude in pain, and took leave of me with a smile. Harley did not even perceive that anything was amiss with him.

Still an impression dwelt in my mind, that the misunderstanding between Hugh and Laura was such a one as a few words would clear up. Nothing

could entirely vanquish my persuasion that their love was mutual, though this separation had occurred.

A few days later, I ventured to hint this to my brother ; but my intervention was ill timed. He heard me with incredulity, and then told me some of the particulars of his last interview with Laura.

“ She listened to my remonstrances with a chilling apathy for some minutes,” said he, “ and absolutely refused any explanation of her seeming caprice. When I urged on her the claim to her confidence, which I imagined our engagement gave me, she assailed me with stinging reproaches ; vehemently asserting that I had never truly loved her, or I should not have treated her as I had done : yet how I had offended her she would not say. Finally, she protested that we were not made for each other’s happiness, and therefore had better part. I took her at her word. Throughout the whole scene, she was more like a wilful, petted child, than the high-hearted girl I had always taken her to be.”

Even yet, I was unconvinced. Laura was proud and high-spirited ; and, as I knew, her engagement had commenced in a way that wounded her to

the quick. Hugh was not aware of this, and my lips were sealed by the promise that Laura herself had exacted from me.

Very shortly, however, all my doubts and hopes were annihilated, by information which Mrs Herbert was prompt to convey to us: namely, that Miss Rivers was about to marry the Captain Martin with whose name hers had been already coupled. The only manifestation of feeling Hugh made when he heard this was a half-sigh, which I alone, who was close beside him, heard.

"And the marriage is to take place almost immediately," added Blanche: "Mr Rivers will not give his whimsical daughter the chance of altering her mind again. I have it from good authority, I can assure you—from no other than her Cousin Grace."

We neither of us attempted to gainsay this news; but my brother, after a few seconds' silence, quitted the room, and left me to listen alone to Mrs Herbert's ample details. It has often caused me to wonder how the private history of families escapes through closed doors and becomes matter of notoriety. My Cousin Blanche seemed as well versed in what had been passing in Mr Rivers'

house during the last few weeks, as if she had moved, an invisible spy, round his hearth and his board all that time. Some slight inaccuracies, however, in her statement of Hugh's case, led me to think that, like them, her other facts were probably speculative ones:—things that *might* have been, but never *were*.

I was not surprised when, on the morrow, Hugh told me that he had some business that would take him away from England for a couple of months. I was glad that he should go until this marriage was over; for the last few weeks had done the work of years on his frame, and I was in hopes that change and an active life would restore his former vigorous tone of mind and feeling, which his disappointment had begun to warp. He went, and soon after Alan also left us.

During the interval of my brother's absence, Mr Rivers, after a very brief illness, died; and, to everybody's astonishment, his affairs were found to be in an embarrassed condition. He had invested the whole of his property in some joint stock concern which had failed, and this loss was supposed to have accelerated his death. Laura was left solely

dependent on the kindness and charity of her relatives, and she went down to Alderbeck at once. I was very sad for her. This position would gall her proud, sensitive feelings insupportably ; and, much as she had grieved me by her conduct to Hugh, I more than forgave her : I could gladly have taken the poor fatherless, motherless girl, to my heart, and have sheltered her there ; for the world is rarely a kind guardian to such as she was.

“ She will soon learn to regret her fastidiousness,” observed Mrs Herbert, who grew more worldly as prosperity increased ; “ she will find it very different going to the Gays now, from what she did formerly : they are the most selfish people on the face of the earth. Grace even said to me, just before they left London, that she really did not know what they should do with her, if she did not get into better spirits : and I could not but allow that she would be a heavy tax on their kindness. I should not marvel if it ended in her being obliged to take a situation :—Grace hinted as much.”

“ Indeed !” said I, much surprised : “ I thought she was going to be married.”

“ Well, it seems *now* that I was misinformed,”

replied my visiter, hesitatingly: "it is true that Captain Martin proposed to her since it was well known *even* that her fortune was gone; but she refused him: she refused him before also; and very strange it was, for a more gentlemanlike and agreeable man it would be difficult to find:—but Laura always was peculiar in her fancies. What a lucky escape Hugh has had! You see she will have nothing—absolutely nothing; and had the engagement gone on, Hugh would have felt bound to fulfil it."

"Most assuredly," said I; wondering much how this news would affect him. As soon as Mrs Herbert left me, I sat down and wrote to my brother, informing him of Mr Rivers' death, and of the mistake concerning Laura's engagement to Captain Martin. In his reply, he took no notice of the latter part of my letter; and when he returned home, he begged me not to allude to it again.

"What has happened," said he, "cannot alter our relations. Had Laura loved me, glad should I have been to feel that she owed all to me; but I know her and honour her too well, to believe for a moment that her circumstances will affect her sentiments towards me: her spirit will rise as her for-

tunes fall. Mortified and indignant as I felt at first at her caprice, I acknowledge now that she was right to draw back when she had no heart to give me :—a cold unimpassioned wife would have suited me but ill :—Laura has warm affections to bestow, and I hope she will discover ere long some one more worthy of them than she found me.”

Speaking thus, Hugh’s countenance was grave, but not stern. How much or how little tender feeling might still linger in his breast for Laura, it was impossible to tell ; and thenceforward we ceased to mention her name.

My brother had always been assiduous at his business affairs ; but now, more than ever, he seemed to throw himself heart and soul into them. All other interests had apparently vanished out of his world ; his conversations with Harley were of the driest and most matter-of-fact quality : bonds, stocks, consols, and merchandise of all kinds supplied inexhaustible topics ; and as I listened, I trembled lest the greed of gain, that worldly earth-crust which hardens over so many hearts, should cover his, and render it impenetrable to all fine and subtle emotions.

During the two years that succeeded this event, Hugh added considerably to his possessions at Thorney; and though we had never been down there since the time when he went to take possession, I understood from Aunt Thomasine that he had made many improvements, both in the old hall itself and in his newly acquired property around it. Between my brother and me the subject was tacitly avoided: both remembered too well the pleasant plans that had been laid, and the bright hopes that had been indulged, when we were there. Mrs Herbert took a deep interest in his progress, and frequently urged him to marry.

"What is the use," she would say to him, "of getting up a fine place and leaving no one to inherit it?"

"There is time enough yet," was his usual reply to her banter. "I do not feel old enough for a marriage of interest—and if I live and die single, there is Frank."

"But he would not perpetuate your name," persisted Blanche: "it is a duty you owe to your family to marry."

"Then, cousin, it is a duty I do not feel called upon to fulfil at present."

There was a lady whom Mrs Herbert would gladly have seen Hugh's wife—a sister of her husband, a very handsome and accomplished person, but one to whom my brother had a marked dislike:—perhaps because she was intruded on his attention. I think the hidden wound was only scarred over, not radically cured; and that it even yet bled sometimes in secret. I did not think it likely that he would ever marry; but I said nothing either one way or the other.

XLVIII.

Aunt Thomasine soon after this—either because she was wearying of her solitude, or because she thought the master of Thorney ought to be on his estate at Christmas—wrote Hugh an urgent letter, begging him to go down thither, and saying it was nearly three years since she had seen any of us.

“So long, is it?” mused my brother, turning the letter over in his hand: “so long as three years! We will go, Grisell: Harley, you, the children, and I.” And thus it was arranged. Though it was the least agreeable season for the country, we went

gladly, and on our arrival received calls and invitations in abundance from the people of the neighbourhood. They now began to recognise Hugh as one of themselves: at our former visit to Thorney, they had been backward, but Aunt Thomasine had made intimacies with stately dowagers, and pioneered the way into the very exclusive society of the valley. The gentry here were exceedingly stiff, and very tenacious of their dignity: some families there were, of high respectability, who never made their way into the "best company."

The first entertainment to which we went was at the house of a Colonel D'Arcy, from whom Hugh had lately repurchased some of the old Thorney lands. It seemed to me, as the names were announced, that we had got back into the middle ages; for, almost without exception, the guests were members of families that had been settled in the vale for centuries:—Chaytors, Huttons, Nevils, Wywills, Scroopes, Powletts, with old christian names still perpetuated amongst them, and a certain aristocratic, haughty air, which had not had the purple bloom rubbed off by indiscriminate contact with the world beyond Wensleydale. All the

guests were equally strangers to me, and on returning to the drawing-room after dinner, I was glad to see children playing on the hearth-rug; for I can always grow intimate with them more quickly than with their elders. But my attention was speedily drawn away even from them to a lady, who neither rose nor turned her head when we entered; she was reading at a circular table, which was littered with books, and though her head was bent down and her face averted, I could not be mistaken in thinking that I recognised Laura Rivers. For certainty's sake, however, I inquired of a lady beside me.

"Oh! she is only the governess," was the reply: "I believe her name is Rivers."

I went towards her and spoke; she raised her eyes with a startled expression, but speedily recovering herself, she offered me her hand, and we glided into a common-place exchange of inquiries and replies. Laura had gained a calm, self-possessed manner since we last met; she must have struck any one as an extremely handsome person. She was dressed in black, close to the throat and wrists, without any ornament; her abundant dark

hair was wreathed round the back of her head : and this severely simple style suited well with her finely moulded form, and clear, accurate features. She had lost something of the brilliance of her complexion, and in repose there was a certain weary, worn look about her mouth, as if her present life was more thoughtful than active, more toilsome than pleasant ; but still her beauty was remarkable.

We had not been conversing together many minutes before Mrs D'Arcy came up to where we sat, and asked Laura to go to the piano and play an accompaniment for a lady who was going to sing. This first performance over, some one asked the governess herself to sing. Laura complied without hesitation ; her voice had gained in fulness and expression of late years, and her rich tones had not long poured their melody forth before the gentlemen entered the drawing-room. I glanced at Laura, and detected a momentary quiver of her eyelids and a slight suffusion of her cheek, as if she felt who approached ; but there was no pause in her song. My brother's quick ear had recognised the once-loved voice, and as he entered, the last of the train, his gaze turned instantly to Laura : his eye

dilated ; he seemed disturbed, surprised ; but after a moment's scrutiny, which left him in no doubt of who it was, he remained standing near the fire, his gaze averted and his mouth compressed. The children were now kissed and despatched to bed, and when Laura had finished the song, she rose to go with them ; one chubby little rogue, with a manifest disregard to appearances, climbed up into her arms and clung round her neck : they all seemed to love her very much. I saw Hugh raise his glance to her face as she passed near him ; but hers was averted, and their eyes did not meet. More than once afterwards, when the door opened, he looked towards it ; but Laura did not reappear. I think he was disappointed.

I expected to hear my brother allude to this meeting, but he did not do so : as we drove home, he never spoke, and for some days he was more preoccupied even than his wont. It happened one very frosty morning about a week later, that I and Hugh, with the children, set out for a brisk walk to a certain piece of water where his uncle had promised to teach Frank to skate ; being shallow it was also safe, and while we were trudging along a

narrow lane, bordered by high hedges, and with many a wind and turn, we came suddenly upon the D'Arcy children and Miss Rivers.

Frank instantly opened a conversation with a boy of his own age, and Ruth was soon acquainted with two girls of about hers. The children had turned the two parties into one, little imagining the embarrassment caused thereby; for we were all bound on the same enterprise, and should thus spend at least an hour in each other's company. I asked Laura how Mrs D'Arcy was, and we soon exhausted the topic of the weather. Hugh walked a little apart; they had recognised each other by a grave bow at first, but they did not exchange a word afterwards. Miss Rivers evidently curtailed the amusement of her charges to escape the restraint of our company. I was sorry to see her go thus, for I had ventured to indulge some vague hopes of reconciliation and renewed love between them. In losing the impetuous pride of her spoiled girlhood, she had, I was certain, acquired many fine and noble qualities. Perhaps I admired her none the less for the placid coldness of her demeanour towards Hugh: it was not her place to make the first

step towards a reconciliation ; and, though some secret feeling whispered me that at the very first glance all the old passion and tenderness had sprung up again in each heart, I knew she would keep aloof until Hugh should solicit its return. Whether he would so far overcome his ancient resentment as to do this was yet to be seen.

The evening of that day we spent alone in the pleasant parlour which went by the name of Miss Grisell's room ; it was the one which Aunt Thomasine usually occupied when we were not there, and she had gathered into it many quaint remnants of the old furniture, discarding such as had been left in it by the last occupant. Amongst others were portraits of Miss Grisell and her two brothers ; also that of Squire Ralph, which I had seen in the east room at our first visit, and another of his first wife. My dear, old aunt had done her utmost to feel, in all her belongings and objects of daily contemplation, that she was of ancient lineage—a Randal of the old school. Hugh glanced round this room many times during the evening, whilst a covert smile lurked at the corners of his mouth,—a smile half bitter, half scornful—not scornful of Aunt

Thomasine, but of his own successful ambition, I think.

How poor a thing it was, after all, for which he had spent the best part of his days! He had won back these old, gray walls, which he was content to see for a few days yearly—or not so often: he was laying field to field and acre to acre; yet he could not tell who should enjoy them. There were no loving eyes to answer his with their most devoted sympathy; other and dearer cares had stepped in between him and me; there was no heart which had his success for its best hope, his tenderness for its best reward. I pictured him to myself alone in his age, when the turmoil of active life should be passed, striving vainly to satisfy his soul with this cold, inanimate wealth, which he was slowly gathering.

“It is not enough; it is not enough,” I said to myself; “he begins to feel it already: he is dissatisfied:—his prize has turned out a blank upon his hands.”

Then I thought how different all would be if there were a loving companion always beside him; pleasant children’s voices resounding through the silent, empty rooms;—more cares, perhaps, but

more pleasures too : the kind, heart-stirring sympathies, the joys, the mutual sufferings, borne and wept together, which are held sacred as the treasures of home :—troubles which two souls share as one, and joys with which no alien intermeddles. Looking at my brother's face, I trusted and prayed that his life might not be a disappointment, but that what was for his happiness might come to pass.

Aunt Thomasine's reflections must have followed much the same train as mine ; but, knowing Hugh less intimately than I, she had not the delicacy in giving them utterance that I felt : half in earnest and half in jest, she asked him, when he was going to give Thorney a mistress. He had been in a deep study for some minutes, and the old lady's voice startled him unpleasantly ; he rose and began to pace the room, a habit he had when disturbed, but made no reply : perhaps he had not understood her. She turned and addressed me.

" You met a Miss Blounte at Colonel D'Arcy's last week ; did you not, Grisell ? " she asked : I replied in the affirmative. " Did you not think her a charming person ? " I had not observed her

closely : but I had seen a middle-aged lady of that name, with a severely sensible countenance, who talked politics, and expressed decisive opinions on matters usually reckoned beyond a woman's province.

"She is the very wife for Hugh," added my aunt, in a loud whisper. "She has a fine property adjoining Thorney, and has managed it admirably ; improved it in every way ; been her own steward and manager : she is a remarkably clever, shrewd woman—I wish Hugh would think about her ; it would be so very suitable."

I mentally compared my impression of the large-featured, strong-voiced Miss Blounte, with the delicate, retiring Laura Rivers, and was compelled to say that my good old aunt's ideas of suitability differed widely from mine.

"What fault do you find in her?" demanded Miss Thomazine, surprised.

"She is too old, in the first place," said I.

"She has forty thousand golden charms," whispered Harley ; who, though he had a book in his hand, was listening to our little discussion : my husband looked mischievously at the old lady, and

added ; “ but I do not think Randal will be found susceptible to their impression—ask him.”

“ What is all this about me ? ” inquired Hugh, coming to a stand near the fire.

“ We are match-making,” answered Harley.

“ Then I can have no interest in it,” replied my brother, and continued his interrupted walk.

Aunt Thomasine looked disappointed ; the opportunity for bringing forward her views was lost : it was impossible to jest with Hugh on that subject ; she turned to me with a sigh, and murmured something about the perversity of even the best of men.

XLIX.

Colonel D’Arcy and my brother had business to transact, which often required their presence at each others’ houses. Hugh was very frequently at Wood End, and I observed that on his return thence, he was often impatient of anybody’s company but his own : there was a hard struggle going forward in his heart at this time ; I could not but watch it with

interest, knowing as I did what hung upon its issue. One morning he had been absent some hours, and on his return home, he summoned me to take a walk with him on the terrace. I perceived immediately that something important had occurred: drawing my hand through his arm, he prefaced his communication by saying, that he was going to give me pleasure, he hoped.

"I have been to Wood End, and I have seen Laura," he added.

"Well."

"I made a point of seeing her—I had meditated it for some days; we return to London next week; I could not go without an explanation—without telling her how I still love her: how I have never ceased to love her during our long separation."

"How did she receive it?"

"As I expected—with coldness at first; but I acknowledged that I had been hasty in condemning her, and she confessed that she had been wrong to mistrust me. When there is love which has suffered, between two people, let them be ever so proud, they cannot fail to see at last any mistake there may have been; and I think, Grisell, that I

may say Laura is mine now more than ever she was."

"You have taken the right and most manly course," said I; "her affection never swerved from you, any more than did yours from her: but what was the root of offence on her side? Some there must have been."

"She told me it shyly: she made one grand mistake in estimating my character, and from that arose all subsequent misunderstanding. I had never told her of our humble origin; she heard it sneered at by her cousins of Alderbeck, and would not believe that I should keep such a fact from her. Mr Rivers knew it, but it is true I never spoke of it to her: when she wrote to ask him, and received assurance of the fact, there were not wanting some to persuade her, that the deception was intentional on my part: letters were intercepted, and when I called on her after she came home, and asked for explanation, she, thinking herself injured, refused it, and I withdrew. Clearly the fault was with me—all my suffering was not unmerited: had I been less hasty, and more considerate for the proud yet affectionate heart with which I had to deal—more

unreserved—these three years of misunderstanding would have been saved us both. She longs to see you, Grisell.”

“I shall not delay,” said I; “and glad am I that the cloud which has been brooding over you so long is dispersed at last.”

“You may say that indeed, sister; the world looks much the brighter for its withdrawal: but I had many aching doubts of what would be the issue of my plan before I tried it. My hopes fell, too, when Laura stood before me silent and pale—the first renewal of them was, when a great tear, after glittering for a moment on her downcast lashes, fell heavily on her hand: she let me kiss it off, and the next minute she was sobbing in my arms; then my heart beat with its old, warm pulsation, certain at last that she was its own! There, Grisell, are you satisfied?”

“Perfectly,” returned I, pressing his arm with my encircling hand, whilst I glanced up to see if the overcast brow and gloomy eye were lightened; they were: he was my own honest, kindly brother again; the oppressive trouble had left him free once more.

Not many hours after this, Laura and I were sitting opposite each other in her little schoolroom at Wood End. She had wept before me, and the calm self-possession of manner which had excited my notice was all vanished for the moment; she was again the warm, impulsive girl, happy in the consciousness of being beloved, such as I had known her years before: with her coldness had disappeared also the care-worn expression from her lips. I could have imagined the interval only a troubled dream, and that she was sitting in my parlour at home, telling me, as I remembered she once did, that I was sending her away happier than she came; the same glow was on her cheek, the same flickering shyness in her eyes.

“Oh! Mrs Harley, how can I ever repay Hugh for the pain I have caused him!” she exclaimed, kneeling down before me, and clasping my hands fervently in hers.

“By loving him,” said I.

“Ah! that I never ceased to do,” she murmured, regretfully: “I did not trust as I ought to have done, yet still I loved him; and what must have been your indignation at seeing him so misunderstood: I have your forgiveness to win.”

"It is yours—only make Hugh happy. Laura, his heart is of pure gold—he is worthy of the best love you can give him."

"I know it—alas, that I should have been blind so long! How could I doubt him? Oh, that I could teach him to forget it, and to remember only how I honour him and how I love him!"

"You have nothing to fear, Laura; you will find him an apt scholar: I am not sure whether I ought not to quarrel with you for stealing all his thoughts away from me."

"Has he thought of me much and often?" she asked, softly, turning her eyes away.

"You want me to betray secrets."

"But tell me," she urged, pleadingly.

"Well, I think you have followed him as closely as his shadow—only he saw you in cloudy days as well as in bright ones: he will tell you."

"I am glad, for it has been the same with me—he has never been out of my thoughts for a day: how strange that we should have met as we did!"

"And you would not look at him that night."

"Ah! but I *felt* he was there."

"And when we met you in the lane, you did not speak."

"Neither did he: but we were drawing nearer in silence than we should have done, could we have fallen into light talk like common acquaintance—we were repenting and regretting."

"Then you could not have been better employed," said I.

"Did you think this would ever come to pass?" she asked.

"I hoped so, for my brother's sake: you were the light of his eyes, Laura; and while you were taken away from him, all the world was dark. He was a changed man when he came to me after that interview in which you repulsed him so cruelly."

"And how I cried when he was gone!"

"Poor child!—well, don't weep now—it is all over, and you are going to be happy."

"I am happy—so happy—more than I deserve."

She sat for a little while silent, with her cheek resting on my hand. Watching her face, I saw her lips part, and a soft, sweet smile hover about them; presently she looked up and said, "Mrs Harley, I am so changed in some things since we talked to—

gether last : then, doubting whether Hugh really loved me, I could not bear to think that I should owe anything to him ; now, it is my chief pleasure to feel that I shall have nothing but what he gives me—for, you know, he *must* be taking me for myself alone.”

I could not help smiling. “ What could you give him that would be half so precious ? ” said I.

“ I am very happy,” she repeated, resting her head against my knee as she sat on the carpet. I let her dream for a few minutes ; but I had a mission to perform, and I wished to get it over and return to Hugh, who was anxiously waiting for me.

“ Laura,” said I, “ we intended to go back to London next week ; but Hugh wants to take you with him, and of course I must stay to see you married—when shall it be ? ” She glanced up in amazement.

“ Oh, no ; indeed I cannot be married yet,” she exclaimed : “ Hugh does not expect it.”

“ Yes, he does : he will not leave Wensleydale until you go with him : there is no need for delay, he says.”

Laura began to look perverse, and would only

reiterate : " No, no ; not yet," to all my arguments and entreaties.

" Then Hugh must come and persuade you himself, said I, rising to depart : " don't be too tyrannical, Laura." She smiled mischievously. " I see Hugh will have neither peace nor certainty until the magic words are pronounced. I shall advise him to be very resolute with you," said I, shaking my head reproachfully.

She made a little defiant *moue*, and then bending her beautiful head, and turning her face half from me, said : " I acknowledge my master. I fear him a little, else I should not love him so much."

" Then do not rebel, Laura, against his reasonable wishes."

" But it is not reasonable to want to be married so soon : it is the very climax of unreason. Mrs D'Arcy cannot spare me without due notice."

" Well, I shall leave you to Hugh now : this argument is for him. Changed as you may be, Laura, there is a spice of the old spirit left, I perceive."

" Certainly : you would not know me if it were all gone ; neither would he," returned she, smiling

archly: then, with deeper feeling, she added: "It has come so suddenly upon me, this revival of my happiness; I must have time to reflect on the change, and prepare for the high and holy duties I am to undertake."

"You will learn them better under a master than without one, it seems to me," I answered. "I am sure the time of probation for both of you has been long enough; and as you will be happier when you are united than you can be before, do not trifle with each other. Let me carry a favourable answer to Hugh—come, Laura, do."

Still the perverse "No, no:" it was the only answer I could get, and with it I was obliged to go away.

What form of persuasion my brother used I cannot say; but he contrived, after some difficulty, to induce Laura to consent to as brief a delay as possible; and, in rather more than three weeks after their meeting at Wood End, Laura left it as his bride.

L.

We are somewhat primitive people in Wensleydale, and perhaps a more antiquated nook than Thorney could not be found even in it. Wood End being near our village, Hugh and Laura were married at Thorney church, very quietly, on a bright frosty morning towards the end of January. I was up betimes that day, and away to join Laura ; who, in the absence of any relative, wished me to be with her. I found her not up, and weeping sadly.

“What is the matter, Laura ?” I asked in great amazement ; for she had been quite gay and joyous the day before.

“Oh ! I wish I could put off this dreadful marriage for another year !” she exclaimed, between sobs and tears.

I made no reply, for she was very nervous and excited : and, moreover, it was time she was getting dressed. She would accept no assistance but mine, and we spent two hours alone before we were summoned to join the rest of the party.

"Look at yourself, Miss, do," said Mrs D'Arcy's old nurse, who came in once or twice to see if she could help; "you are real beautiful, to be sure."

This homely praise was truth itself, and it brought the first smile to Laura's lips that I had seen since I arrived. The good-natured old woman had in her hand a little roll of white satin ribbon, which she gave to me.

"You must remember to give that to the bride, Mrs Harley, afore you leave the vestry, after she is married," said she.

"What is it for?" inquired Laura.

"Oh! you must wait and see: everybody who is wed at Thorney church always has a white ribbon to give away," was the reply. As its meaning was equally unknown to me, I could not explain; but, taking possession of the roll, I accompanied Laura down stairs, where Colonel and Mrs D'Arcy, with Ruth, the little D'Arcys, and Aunt Thomasine, were waiting for her. We entered two carriages and drove to church.

"Has Laura got a ribbon?" whispered my aunt to me; "I entirely forgot it until this moment."

I exhibited the piece with which the nurse provided us.

"That is right. Dear me, how very lovely she is!"

The old lady might well say so; I never saw any one more delicately and regularly beautiful than Laura looked that morning. She was rather pale, and her eyes had a softness unusual to them: there was, too, an expression of deep feeling in her countenance; and now that she was quite calm, the traces of her recent emotion only added to its tenderness and charm.

Hugh and Harley were waiting in the church, and when we entered a solemn hush fell: the old clerk made himself officiously useful in displacing and placing everybody, especially the little D'Arcy girls and Ruth, who officiated as bridesmaids, and the ceremony began.

Through the window above the altar poured a yellow flood of winter sunshine, lighting on Laura and Hugh as they knelt before it.

Aunt Thomasine was a picture to behold, as she stood in her stiff brocade behind them, and, if the expression of her face could be trusted, blessing them

in her heart all the while : as she had told us, this marriage left her nothing to desire.

In all solemnity and seriousness, they seemed to be taking their vows upon them to be each other's mutual support and comfort until death should them part. Hugh's voice was as firm and steady as if in ordinary conversation. Laura's faint and subdued, so as to be scarcely audible ; but when she turned from the altar, and our eyes met, hers were filled with a radiant yet softened joy, that left no doubt how fully her heart echoed every word that her lips had promised ; while the blushing tremors that chased each other across her face, heightened its singular loveliness.

Then came the ceremony of signing names, which seemed rather prolonged ; for the D'Arcys, who were to part with Laura at the church-door, had many last words to say.

Several times, while we were waiting, I saw the round, rosy face and rough head of a country boy peeping curiously into the vestry ; and Aunt Thomasine, also descrying him, took the ribbon which I held and passed it to Laura.

At length, Hugh and she turned to the door and

descended the step into the chancel ; immediately a shrill, little voice cried out,—“ Please to give me your garter, Miss ;” and Laura, with a smile and a blush, gave him the ribbon ; which Aunt Thomasine said he did not deserve for calling her “ miss.” Then the bells began to ring, and so we left the church.

A couple of hours later, Harley, I, the children, and Aunt Thomasine, tightly packed in a post-chaise, reversed the usual order of things, and set out on our return to London ; leaving Thorney Old Hall to be brightened and hallowed by two of the best and warmest hearts that ever beat.

“ There,” said I to myself, as we drove through the griffin-guarded gates—“ there ends my mission with regard to Hugh : he has got a tenderer, closer friend now than I could be to him, and pray Heaven he may be happy !”

During our drive to the town, where we were to take the coach, my husband and Aunt Thomasine discussed the ceremony of the piece of ribbon ; for which it seemed the village lads had been accustomed to run after a wedding from time immemorial—either that, or a piece of money redeeming it.

The old lady took a mild view of it, as a relic of Thorney's ancient customs, and one which would not have been overlooked even had Miss Grisell Randal herself been married; otherwise, I imagine, she would have voted it "frivolous and vexatious," instead of highly respectable from its antiquity.

II.

It had been well understood between Hugh and Laura that the greater part of the year would have to be passed by them in London; though, at the same time, my brother had said it was his object to remain in commerce only long enough to gather sufficient wealth to retire to Thorney, and there spend the rest of his days in quiet, domestic pleasures; improving his property, and raising the condition of the peasantry. He had some very fine theories, on this subject especially: mere theories they were destined to remain, for many, many years.

"Laura will not be content to live amongst the owls at Thorney long," remarked Mrs Herbert,

with a faint sneer, when I had finished the narrative of the circumstances that had led to my brother's marriage. "I am much mistaken in her character, if she do not wish to shine in society as she used to do; and if her taste for it be not increased by her having been debarred from it for two or three years."

Reluctantly, I was soon obliged to confess to myself, that Blanche was not altogether wrong; for no sooner had Hugh and his wife got established in the handsome house he had caused to be fitted up for their reception, than Laura proceeded to gather around her all her old intimates, and to prepare for what seemed to me an existence of mere pleasure and indolence.

Hugh put no check on her expenses; he was at once so happy in her love, and so proud of her beauty, that he did not seem to have the power left to deny her anything. Yet at this period it is most probable that her good sense and affection combined would have made her sensible to any remonstrance however slight: unfortunately, her husband could not find it in his heart to make it.

The story of unequal marriages has been worn

almost threadbare ; but there are other inequalities besides those of rank, and some such existed between Hugh and Laura : perhaps they were of a nature as derogatory to the still, fireside happiness of married life as even those more palpable ones which mark the union between a noble and a peasant. Most people might have said that socially they were equal, but it is certainly true that they had been trained for totally different spheres of life ; and though the advance of the one and the decline of the other brought them on a seeming level, there were many opposite tendencies in their education.

In Hugh's nature there was assuredly no stamp of meanness ; no sordid cravings : the mere ostentation of wealth was abhorrent to him. He had made his way over many and great difficulties, and had kept through all a spotless name ; but it was evident that he *had* worked his way. His character differed essentially from that of the men with whom Laura had mixed as a girl : he had less of the uniform polish which distinguishes those who have found their fortunes ready made, and have had to travel only on the very smoothest of high-roads. Doubtless there is much energy

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amongst them, but the habit of society equalizes their manners, tones their voices, regulates almost their thoughts. There was not a greater contrast between Hugh's strong features, massive frame, and alert eye, and the finical neatness and elegance of a dandy, than between his and their feelings. I believe, that without an occupation to call out the activity and energy of his mind, he would have been miserable : as some people regard pleasure as the chief good, so he regarded work.

Laura could scarcely understand this : " Never mind ! " was a sentiment continually on her lips ; and with her best feelings centred in her husband, she was taking one of the surest ways to undermine both his happiness and her own. Perhaps I am not the fairest judge of her ; we had been brought up for such widely different positions : hers luxurious and idle, mine careful and laborious. Things that appeared to me extravagant, were for her the merest necessities of life ; and I dreaded that these expensive habits of hers would soon prove to be as little suited to her husband's means as they were to his tastes. But whatever the results, this was not a case for interference. " *Entre le bois et l'écorce on*

ne met pas le doigt," is a proverb not to be disregarded with impunity.

I was present at a little discussion between Laura and Hugh about a year after their marriage, which showed me painfully how matters stood ; and also that my brother was not blind to the ruinous effects of his indulgence, or to his wife's lack of even ordinary prudence. He had been compelled to hint at retrenchment. " Sell Thorney," was Laura's calm suggestion in reply ; " sell Thorney. It is of very little use to keep the old place up, for it is quite impossible for us to live there now ; and even if, ten years hence, we might be disposed to retire, and vegetate in the country, it would be far pleasanter to have a house near London : Thorney is so out of the world, I should never wish to settle down there."

Hugh turned on her a surprised, hurt glance ; but she did not observe it, being busy in the arrangement of some beautiful exotics in the flower-stand by the window. He began to pace the room, his hands behind him, and his brow overcast : I had seen that expression once before their marriage—mingled anger and mortification.

" We are going out to-night, remember : don't

be late in coming home, Hugh," cried Laura, as he went towards the door.

He turned and came back to where she stood. "Seriously, Laura, you advise the sale of Thorney?" he asked in a hard voice; which caused his wife to raise her eyes to his face.

"What do *you* think of it?" she returned confusedly. "I have often wondered at your buying it as a mere sinking fund; and really, if there is any difficulty about our expenses, the most sensible plan will be to sell what we cannot enjoy."

"It would give a very temporary relief," answered Hugh in the same forced tone.

"But get rid of it. There the money lies dead, as it were: and, besides, I shall be relieved from the horror I have of seeing you turning into a dronish country squire, when it is sold," persisted Laura, laying her hand softly on his, and looking into his eyes beseechingly.

For once he disregarded both the caress and the glance.

"Laura, we have begun where we ought to have been contented to end," said he more gently; "and if we go on thus, you will have the pain of seeing your husband a ruined merchant—*worse* than a squire."

Laura grew grave for a moment, then pouting her rosy lips, said that he was only jesting, and that she wished he would not speak of such very unpleasant matters. Hugh sighed. She put her arm round his neck and kissed him, and with an admonition to come in in better spirits for the evening party, to which they were going together, returned to her flowers.

If I had not seen and heard, I could not have believed how much unbounded indulgence will do to make a naturally kind, good heart, selfish. Hugh hovered about her for a few minutes, and then, finding her too absorbed in her light occupation to listen to his arguments, he left the room, and soon after the house. Laura began to sing softly to herself while she went about the flowers, occasionally interrupting herself to ask my opinion of their arrangement, and evidently quite unmoved by what Hugh had been saying : or perhaps wholly forgetful of it.

LII.

That evening Mrs Herbert gave an entertainment, and there I met Hugh and Laura for the

second time that day. They came late: it was my brother's fault, Laura informed me, as he had kept her waiting half an hour. Hitherto I had never seen my sister-in-law in other costume than the quiet morning-dress, or simple style that she adhered to at home. I was irresistibly struck by the exquisite beauty of her face and form, as they now appeared set off to the highest advantage by the rich yet tasteful attire she wore. The perfect contour of her features was unshaded, her dark hair being all gathered away in close bands, and wreathed into a knot behind with a string of large pearls. The carriage of her head always had something haughty about it: Laura was proud at heart, and it showed itself occasionally in her simplest gestures. The soft carmine of her cheek melted imperceptibly into the delicate whiteness of chin and throat; her lips curved; the upper short, the lower full, were of the most vivid scarlet. No pale, interesting beauty was Laura, but one full of life, and glow, and spirits: I could not wonder at Hugh's pride in her. Any little annoyance he might have felt in the morning had worn off; and as he entered Mrs Herbert's rooms, I had never seen him look more happy or content: Laura's in-

fluence was at this time supreme—over his heart it was throughout.

The company assembled were, with few exceptions, perfect strangers to me, for I had gone very little into society since we had lived in London ; I therefore took a retired seat in the corner of a couch, and made my silent observations on what passed before me, interrupted by an occasional exchange of remarks on the atmosphere of the rooms with an elderly lady who sat very upright beside me. Hugh was speedily drawn into conversation by a group of men, who clustered unsociably together in a recess formed by a window ; from the earnestness of their gestures, I judged they were discussing some political or business theme : many men never disentangle themselves entirely from these topics. For some time Hugh listened and replied with interest, but after a while he fell into a silence : then I could not resist comparing his eagle eye, so keen yet so steady, his granite brow, his firm, fine lips, with the sensual type of a countenance near him ; with the dogmatic, obstinate expression of another, and the pert inanity of a third : even Mr Herbert's elegance of face and per-

son seemed feeble and meaningless beside his half-civilized, energetic, characterized face. Soon I perceived that he was observing Laura, where she sat the centre of a group of the gayest and liveliest in the room, conspicuous as well by the greater admiration she attracted as by the superior loveliness and grace of her person.

In these mixed parties I have observed that a certain set always flutter round the most distinguished woman in the room : they are often of the most frivolous and trifling order, and so they were now. It rather excited my wonder to see how Laura could bandy words with such coxcombs. It was not until afterwards that I learnt that one of them was Captain Martin ; he was assiduous in his attendance on her the whole evening, turning the leaves of her songs when she sang, handing her down to supper, and even offering to put on her cloak in the ante-room when we were going away. I was glad to see Hugh quietly dispossess him of the garment, and place it over his wife's shoulders himself. There was a conscious power and right in this trifling act that checked the young officer's somewhat officious attentions, and gave him to un-

derstand that, how much soever he might envy Hugh as his successful rival, he would never be able to despise him.

LIII.

At this period I heard no more mention of the need of economy, and Thorney was never alluded to: my brother had other thoughts in his heart. I have seen him come to my house excited, and yet struggling to be calm, with his violent passions only curbed by the strongest effort: it was impossible to ask him what agitated him, for he strove to hide his vexation even from me. It might have been thought then that his wealth was inexhaustible, for he was so prodigal in his gifts to Laura that she was justified in taking his recent remonstrances as needless and uncalled for. His devotion and affection seemed redoubled: I believe he would have cut off his right arm rather than deny her most unreasonable whim—rather, indeed, than not anticipate it. I was glad he did not take me into his confidence here: it was just.

that this struggle should be gone through in silence : but I understood it. There was always one in close attendance on Laura whom she encouraged, whose society she enjoyed evidently : it was this incense of vanity that Hugh strove to turn to his own account, by contrasting it perpetually with his complete devotion. No suspicion of Laura's truth approached him, but he was jealous of her every thought : he would hold her heart an "entire and perfect chrysolite." What were the gray walls of Thorney to her love ? what ruin itself, if it purchased her sole allegiance ? So quietly, so systematically, yet so unwearyingly did he work, that Laura's "shadow," as our cousin Blanche called this admirer, gradually melted away in the glow and light that her husband's passionate devotion made around her.

"I believe I am the happiest woman in the universe !" cried Laura one evening, when Hugh had left us together. "Grace says it is antiquated to be so fond ; but truly, Grisell, I love my husband a thousandfold better than I did before we were married. It is very pleasant to be so worshipped : sometimes I wish there were any great sacrifice that I

could make to show him how I appreciate his affection !”

“ Few lives offer opportunities for *great sacrifices*,” said I ; “ but every one gives room for those small, daily acts of forbearance and self-denial which make up the sum of our happiness.”

She looked at me intently for a moment, feeling that my words were meant to convey more than met the ear, then murmured reflectively : “ I believe that is true.” She remained silent for a space, gazing musingly into the fire ; then, raising her face, suddenly asked, “ Grisell, do you think I have done all that I might have done to make my husband happy ?”

“ Oh, Laura ! who can answer that question so well as yourself ?”

“ Sometimes I fear I have not ; and if—”

“ If what ?”

“ If I should not live !”

“ You must not indulge in any nervous forebodings : Hugh would be pained if he heard you now.”

“ I try not, yet I cannot help it. Last night these fears came very strong upon me : I could not

help picturing to myself Hugh alone, and poor me no longer here to tease him or to love him—for I do love him!—you believe that, Grisell?”

“Yes, surely.”

“I thought how sad he would be, and how he would miss me, until I fairly wept! Then I wished I had never grieved him, as—as I know I have: though he will not remember it then!”

“Come, come, Laura,” said I gaily, “this is foolish; you must not cherish these dreary fancies: whatever little naughtinesses you may have been guilty of are easily atoned for to Hugh, by kind words and caresses: he will pardon anything to you.”

“Ah! I know that, and I ought not to have tried him: not that he has reproached me—no! not a word of displeasure has he ever spoken! Oh, Grisell! if his forbearance should not be tried much longer!”

“Hush, hush! he is coming!” said I, as his quick step was heard ascending the stairs. She turned to him with smiles as he entered.

“Well, Laura,” cried he, with a choked sigh; “well, Grisell, I think I have found a purchaser for Thorney.” Laura flushed.

"Wait a few weeks—don't be precipitate!" she exclaimed eagerly.

"My darling, it *must* go! there is no help for it."

"And it is my fault!" murmured his wife, drooping her head.

"There is no fault at all," replied Hugh, lifting up her face, and kissing her fondly: "don't say that again, Laura, unless you wish to trouble me."

"But do put off the sale for a little while—it may not need to go: wait!" she persisted.

"Well, don't be disturbed about it."

"Promise me."

"He gave a promise, which she ratified by a fervent kiss, and they both sat down and began to talk as if there were not such a word as disappointment in the long catalogue of earthly troubles; whilst faintly darkening over their hearth was gathering the cloud which no time can ever dissipate.

They had not been long indulging their anticipations, when a servant brought in the letters of the evening post: several for Hugh, one for Laura. She took hers, and opened it carelessly; but as she read, her eyes brightened, then glittered. "Oh,

my husband ! Thorney is saved !” she exclaimed, in a burst of emotion : “ thank God, I can repair that wrong !” She threw herself on his breast, and for some moments sobbed passionately, while he endeavoured to soothe her by the tenderest caresses. Being calmed somewhat, she read aloud the letter which had caused her excitement.

It was from a solicitor, notifying the intelligence of the death of a distant female relative of Mr Rivers, whose man of business the writer had been. The deceased had left Laura her sole heiress : the property being the accumulation of a prolonged and penurious existence, was very considerable ; and never having known her except by name, Laura could not be expected to feel any deep affliction. For my part, no one can tell the relief I experienced, when assured that Thorney would not have to be sold. Its loss would scarcely have been a more bitter pang to Hugh himself than to me ; and I verily believe that it would have half-killed Aunt Thomasine to see the old Hall pass again into strange hands : poor old lady ! she is quite unconscious to this day of how the revered pile was threatened !

LIV.

Would that I could pass over the painful memory of the next few weeks ! but it must be told.

On the morrow after this event Laura gave birth to a son, who was said, professionally, to be one of the very finest babies that ever made a noise in the world. The house was in a state of silent, ecstatic rejoicing. Hugh became a personage of secondary importance, and seemed only too proud and too happy to be overlooked and forgotten by all but Laura ; who, however, under the tyranny of a despotic nurse, was scarcely permitted to speak to him. He sat by himself in the dining-room, trying to read, but after a few minutes of vain effort to fix his attention, he generally ended in pacing the room to and fro. For a really active man, I never knew one who more enjoyed reflection, or perhaps, I may say, day-dreaming. At last, however, he found a vent for his feelings in writing an immensely long letter to Aunt Thomasine, containing hearsay descriptions of his heir. I do not think he had any just idea himself of what it was like ;

but everybody said it was beautiful, and he, as in duty bound, believed it. Laura was going on well: the baby was all that could be desired: Thorney church bells were to be rung: the villagers were to be feasted. These were the main topics of the letter; but here and there were anticipatory bits on the child's future, appealing to all the old lady's dearest prejudices. I was permitted to add a lengthy postscript (recapitulatory, I fear); but Aunt Thomasine could excuse it.

A week passed away: Laura began to weary of her darkened room. To lighten the hours, she in imagination conducted the precious little unconscious thing lying on her arm, through all infantile perils, into a public school. She brought him up in the same way to a youth, such as his father's had been: I believe she even settled in her own mind what profession he was to follow, and what sort of wife she would like him to marry! Poor mother! I can hear you now gravely picturing your baby's future, while through the heavy air came swiftly the angel Death, to part you for ever on earth!

For the first fortnight Laura seemed to be rapidly regaining her strength: arrangements were made

for her to go down to Thorney as soon as she could be moved ; and she seemed even glad at the idea of seeing the dreary old place again. She could want no society, she thought, with her baby there : all her sad forebodings had left her, and with returning health came back her flow of lively spirits.

No family of people could be happier than we were for a little space. One evening Hugh came up and sat with us in Laura's room. The nurse being absent, they talked of their plans, and compared the fancies both had indulged about the boy ; and it was quite pleasant to hear Laura's light, joyous laugh, as she listened to Hugh's grave anticipations. That quaint, little mortal, whose acquaintance with this pain-fraught world was so brief, was destined by one to be a soldier ; the other, from his exceeding gravity, predicted that he would come to be a judge. One laugh louder than usual brought in nurse with a face of grave rebuke. We all felt guilty and condemned before her frown ; and Hugh was rising to go away, when Laura, who held his hand in hers, whispered : " Stay a little longer ! " Perhaps a presentiment fell upon her heart with sudden chill, of how *very little longer* they were to

be together now ! But nurse was imperious : “ Mrs Randal must talk no more, but must go to sleep forthwith.”

As Hugh stooped down to kiss her, Laura put her hand round his neck, and whispered to him for a minute or so : what her words were I cannot tell, but when I looked at her again her eyes were glittering, and my brother’s face also was moved as he turned to leave her. I saw him no more that night : he remained shut up in his own room ; but I heard him pacing the floor almost till dawn.

The next day Laura was languid, and not so well, and on the morrow she began to sink rapidly. On the evening of the third day, we all knew that she must die.

All knew ; but there was one who, in his agony, could not, *would* not believe it : who sat like a statue of stone, with his face buried in his hands, refusing to be comforted ; arraigning God’s providence and justice in His dealings with man, and proudly rebelling against His ordinance.

Not so Laura : she was changed in heart as in countenance, and as death drew near, she said from her soul : “ Thy will, oh God ! be done.” And it

was hard to say this, quitting the world then, and leaving what she left:—her loving friend and husband ; her little, helpless child.

As the moment drew near, Hugh was with her : her last look of earth was on his face ; her last words were heard by him alone. Then when that awful change came over her face—the blank where so late spoke a living soul—he laid her softly out of his arms and sank almost senseless by the bed. I placed the Bible, in which Laura had last read, by his hand, and left him alone with his dead. None but God could help him then.

That night there came from Aunt Thomasine a letter of congratulation. Hugh had been called from its perusal to receive his darling's last sigh. How its homely phrases of rejoicing must have wrung his strong heart as he read, knowing what a bitter mockery they were of the present reality !

LV.

There are calamities which, coming upon us suddenly, darken heaven from our eyes, and leave ever-

more a cloud over our world. For weeks after his bereavement, my brother remained sunk in a stupor of grief: he could not realize to himself that the world must go on with him as of old; that he had scarce reached middle age before the full cup of anguish was forced to his lips; and the dark tide of his life, impregnate with its bitter waters, was condemned to flow on, silent and solitary, without any sunshine to fall on its waves, any light, playful shadows to break its still monotony. That he should behold that loved and lovely face no more, seemed incomprehensible: no more smiles to meet him when weary—no more winding of soft arms round his neck—no more dwelling of warm kisses on his brow!

I have seen him sit for an hour together by the fire, during that dreary winter, with Laura's empty chair drawn up by his own, where she used to like to sit, resting her head on his arm and singing softly.

"It seems to me sometimes that I hear her voice," he said one night, with a trembling eagerness of explanation: "when I look away to the fire, I can almost fancy she is there, and that presently she will begin to sing."

Alas ! the hearth was very silent now she was gone !

I have ceased to wonder how it was that my brother, in his loneliness, dwelt on her memory until, out of a wayward, faulty, yet most tender-hearted woman, he coined a saint. As such, he ever spoke of her : pure, exalted, unapproachable in goodness and beauty. Death is a true refiner ! From our memory he purges away the dross of little faults, which in life we perhaps saw with too quick an eye ; leaving us nothing but the sense of vacancy, and the recollection of how good our lost ones were, and how we loved them !

LVI.

The child, Pierce he was called, grew and prospered. His father never forgot or neglected him ; and perhaps the chief consolation he found in his trouble was watching his boy's progress. In similar circumstances, we have heard of parents avoiding their children, shrinking out of their sight, and manifesting a feeling almost of dislike towards them.

Very different was it with my brother : if possible, he was too anxious.

In process of time, he fell back into the old routine of business ; but it was easy to see how merely mechanical and how devoid of interest it had become. He still inhabited the large house in which Laura died, and kept everything about him as she had left it : as if any day she might return.

When the child was of an age to understand and talk with him, all his leisure was devoted to his instruction or amusement. Especially, he liked to speak to him of that mother whom he had never known ; to impress an idea of her exquisite purity and goodness on his heart : and little Pierce grew to have a holy and exalted feeling of respect for her memory. He was taught to believe that she could see him from her unknown home, and that she could be grieved by his passion as much as if he had her present with him. His warm temper, impatient of control, was his great fault ; otherwise, he was a child of naturally fine instinct ; truthful, brave, and frank, as my brother had been : indeed, with Laura's beauty and loving impetuosity, he inherited all his father's high moral sense. For many years,

Pierce had no other teacher but his father : rather desultory, perhaps, this teaching might be considered by a martinet schoolmaster ; but his natural mind was not cramped or disgusted by rules too early and tightly drawn around it. Meanwhile his frame grew strongly ; and, above all, his heart, trained under such kindly influence, glowed with only loving and pleasant feelings : a finer, handsomer, nobler boy than Pierce Randal never stepped. Well might his father be proud of him !—You should have seen Aunt Thomasine when he went down to Thorney with his father every year for a couple of months : she almost worshipped him. *He was* a Randal indeed, and one of whom his namesake, the old scholar, would never be ashamed ! —Bless him !

“Grisell,” said the old lady reflectively, as we were walking together one day on the terrace, a little way behind my brother and his son,—“Grisell, somebody once said that it took three generations to make a gentleman. Look at Pierce : his grandfather was a mechanic, his father a trader ; yet the lad might be a king’s son !—and not in form or face only ; for what a soul he has ! Did he ever

utter a lie? Did he ever prevaricate for a second? Never—I dare set my life upon it! Yesterday I could have cried over him for joy, when he came in with such a blush of honest sorrow on his face to tell his father of the mischief he had done, in throwing down his pet mare, which he had been advised not to mount. How some boys would have tried to excuse themselves!—he was above it. He had done wrong, and was prompt to confess it—the only atonement he could make. Then mark what a shy, courteous manner he has with his elders; how the poor people take to him; even the very animals about the place, the dogs and horses know and like him better than anybody else! Let that somebody (whose name I do not know) say what he will, Pierce Randal is a gentleman—every inch of him—though there are not three generations between him and a mechanic.”

I had never heard this sentiment, for I was not one to like abstruse and difficult theories; but I daresay Aunt Thomasine quoted quite correctly, and that there was something in what she said, if I could only have understood it: for my part, I had always taken my brother to be a true gentle-

man in feeling, and it did not appear to me either dubious or marvellous that such a father should have such a son. I take truth and courage to be characteristics of a gentleman ; and where they lack, were it in a crowned head, in my secret thoughts I should only rank him as a sorry knave, degrading his position : and all the more contemptible for the purple he sullies.

In the pretty octagon parlour at Thorney, over the mantel-piece, there hung a portrait of Laura, painted very soon after her marriage. Hugh would not have parted with that speaking canvass if he might have had in exchange every acre of ground that had ever been pressed by the foot of a Randal. It was a striking likeness, and represented Laura as she had been in her lighter and gayer moods ; the soft, genial, smiling eyes seemed to follow you over the room ; and when the twilight threw the darker parts of the picture into shadow, the figure stood out almost like life. Many, many times have I seen my brother turn away, with agonized face, from contemplating it.

" How beautiful my mother must have been," said Pierce suddenly one evening, when we were all

together after tea. His father glanced at the picture; the flickering flame of the fire below threw upward on the face a wavering, unsteady glow; the illusion was perfect: she seemed to be watching us, and smiling archly out of her deep eyes.

"She was beautiful," said Aunt Thomasine softly; "and not more beautiful than she was good."

"She was perfect purity, my boy," interrupted his father; "she was tender, loving, truthful: her beauty, great as it was, I counted her least charm. Pierce, my son, you can never know what we lost in losing her! You may revere her memory as that of a saint."

This amiable enthusiasm gave the finishing touch to my dear brother's character, which nature had cast originally in a rugged mould; no one could help loving him better for it: I regarded it as a beautiful trait which sorrow had brought out and strengthened. I could remember the time when he had inclined to the cold, cynical view of human nature; but this was ere love ripened his heart, and affliction mellowed it: ere the grim idol of his youth, old Thorney, had been superseded by tender ties of wife and child.

In a really good heart, both joy and sorrow cherish its best and holiest feelings. Where the soil is good, the time of harvest will never find the grain blighted, immature, or dead ; the ripening sun may defer to shine, but the green fruit waits, steady in rain, and bending to the blast only to spring up more vigorously when it has gone over ; patient till the refining heat change its pale hue to pure gold, and make it ready to be gathered in, full, ripe, and plenteous. Thus to my brother's heart came home, now in his autumn time, the rich fruits of a good life : stores of kind memories garnered up against the lone, coming winter ; food for thought in the past, the present, and the future. His life was shaded, but it was not *all* shade. No man with a conscience like his can be otherwise than calm : only remorse and unpardoned, unconfessed guilt can serve to embitter the whole of a lifetime, and shut out heaven or hope through continuous years.

Ah, Hugh ! bereaved, solitary as you were, you had times of peace and content, such as the happiest might have coveted ; hopes, too, for your boy which rivalled in vividness the day-dreams of your own youth !

LVII.

I shall now pass over an interval of fourteen years, the events of which, so far as they regard myself, may be summed up in one brief sentence—I am alone.

Harley my husband is gone—is dead. Frank is married, and settled in a house of his own. Ruth Langley, who was to me as a daughter, has also left me, and is become the wife of a missionary stationed in India. My home now is at Thorney, with Hugh and Aunt Thomasine.

The windings in life's high-road have brought me back to my brother's right hand, and made us once more fellow-travellers. Looking back upon it, I see many way-marks—grass-grown graves. I know that Death has not dealt with us more hardly than with others, yet what a painful record it is, this story of a single family—what a melancholy list of the loved and lost, who *were* and *are* not! We miss them always; but most about Christmas time, which was so gay, and is so dreary. Then old

recollections, shadows out of past years, come trooping around the hearth, and we sit amongst them silently, listening with subdued hearts to their thrilling whisper.

It is three years since we came down to Thorney to settle. My brother had then increased his means far beyond his wants; he had provided an inheritance for his son, and amply fulfilled his own youthful dreams. The feverish days of ambition were over for him; his dark hair had grown gray, and his expansive brow was deeply furrowed; he could bear now to leave the busy arena in which he had striven so boldly and successfully, and rest from his labours. At first he missed the occupation, the bustle, the routine, in which he had lived for nearly thirty years; but presently his active mind turned back on the early pursuits and studies of his boyhood, when he had meant to rival our old ancestor in learning: afterwards also, as he gained more insight into the wants and deficiencies of his tenants, he set himself vigorously to work to improve their condition.

Pierce was then at school, and during his long absences, his father always seemed graver and

quieter than when he was at home. The lad grew up, ardent, impetuous, and enterprising ; he had nourished his imagination on stories of battle and siege, of warriors and heroes, as diligently as ever Hugh had fed his ambition on the Randal genealogy.

Glory was his lode-star. Glory ! the very emptiest and frothiest of all mortal delusions. When the time came for him to make choice of a profession, he asserted, that rather than not be a soldier, he would serve in the ranks.

"You *shall* be a soldier, my boy," was his father's instant reply ; and though this selection was a grief to him, he kept that amongst his secrets, and never uttered one word of discouragement to his son.

There was very little of the Spartan mother in me : had Frank's early fantasy ripened as did that of Pierce, I fear it would have been impossible to me to give him up—happily he never tried me. Still I felt the wisdom of my brother's decision with regard to his son ; too often, even in my narrow experience, had I seen the ill consequences of misdirected or thwarted energies, to wish to see so

powerful an inclination checked. Pierce had not the steady perseverance necessary for success in any sedentary employment, and it would have been both hazardous and cruel to condemn so impetuous a nature as his to a life of inaction because he was heir to a fine estate. He therefore entered the army; and scarcely had he joined his regiment, when rumours of war began to spread, and amongst the earliest troops ordered for the East was his regiment. He wrote to us enthusiastically to say that he was going out immediately, but that he should come down to Thorney to bid us good-bye. My brother carried the letter to his own room to answer: none of us saw him any more all that day.

LVIII.

In little more than a week after the announcement, Pierce arrived in the wildest and most exuberant spirits. He was scarcely more than a boy yet; and the ecstatic strain in which he talked of the coming struggle, betrayed too plainly that it was the gaudy, blazoned side of the picture that had

always presented itself to his imagination—the scarlet and gold, the braying trumpets, the waving banners, and victory. Alas, for the reverse! But it was not for us to damp his enthusiasm; we endeavoured rather to share it. Aunt Thomasine, who would have been a soldier herself if she had not been a woman, cited many Randals who had borne arms and done the country good service in their day and generation; she also reminded us of the glorious halo which surrounds the memory of the fallen in battle, and needlessly tried to infuse more ardour into the breast of Pierce.

“Be rash rather than backward, nephew,” cried she. My brother glanced at her reproachfully.

“The lad will do his duty,” said he.

“Surely he will! but I would have him do more,” replied the old lady, enthusiastically: “I would have him foremost amongst the brave; following not only where honour leads, but eager wherever there is danger! The men of our family, Pierce ——”

But at this point, the lad, who liked nothing less than one of our kinswoman’s stories from the inexhaustible annals of the Randals, beat a timely

retreat, and presently we heard him on the terrace firing at a mark ; or, as the gardener phrased it, "practising war." My brother drew a long breath the first time the short, sharp sound startled us where we sat, and he murmured half aloud : "I would rather he had remained a man of peace." Aunt Thomasine *looked* some very severe expostulations, but wisely forbore to utter them ; and soon Hugh followed his son to the garden : he could not bear to lose sight of him now that they were going to part.

The leave of absence was not long, and when it expired, my brother went up to London with Pierce, and stayed to see him embark ; then he immediately returned to Thorney, in better spirits, apparently, than he had left it. Some months of inaction followed Pierce's departure. We all became eager politicians, and studied the newspapers incessantly. Aunt Thomasine delivered lectures extempore on the science of war, which might have edified me, if I had understood them ; but she was much too erudite for me, and used words as unintelligible as "heathen Greek," interspersed with anecdotes of more famous warriors than I had ever heard of. She

advocated celerity of movement, and really talked as if she could have managed and settled the whole affair, while the powers that be were only thinking about it. She did not favour Hugh with these discourses, but only me, as I sat at my needle, and a frequent visiter we had just then—little Mary Close, who often rode over from Burndale on a shaggy pony. Mary was much made of by my dear brother—indeed there had been a boy and girl attachment between Pierce and her for a long while; and though experienced heads had counselled a delay of a year or two, the young things could not part without plighting their troth and making an exchange of rings.

Pierce wrote to us but rarely: or perhaps it was that the intervals between each letter appeared long to our anxiety. The same exultant, eager feeling, with which he had set out, pervaded every letter: he wished most ardently to be “doing *something*.” Aunt Thomasine sympathized heartily in his impatience, and made very severe comments on the machinery of war stationed at home: I dare not repeat them, for she herself said more than once, she believed she was talking high treason! Poor

little Mary, who was a coward at heart, was frightened at her vehemence: perhaps, also, she sided with the pacific party, who think "a cruise safer than a fight," and hoped that the matter would come to an issue without hard blows. This possibility was not left her long; tidings came of the landing of the troops in the Crimea: then our anxiety grew every day and every hour.

LIX.

On the 3d October, the report of the battle of Alma and the taking of Sebastopol came down to Thorney. We were a day behind other people in getting the news, but we rejoiced none the less for that. The papers were full of it, and Aunt Thomasine read the whole account aloud to us, while my brother sat by the window, shading his brow with his hand, and listening attentively.

"*His* regiment was in the battle," said he, quietly.

"No doubt! and if it were not, I hope Pierce went without it!" exclaimed the old lady. The

paper being rifled of news, Hugh rose to leave us.

"I will ride over to Burndale and talk to little Mary," said he: "it will be some days before any certain tidings are received—patience, patience!" Even in the midst of his own great anxiety, he did not forget the quivering young heart in which the news of the great victory must have awakened wailing echoes and fears equal to his own. His composure and self-command astonished me.

What a glorious day it was; pure, cloudless, sunny almost as June. Aunt Thomasine and I sat by the open window talking of the battle, and listening to the bells of Middleham and Burndale further down the valley, which were ringing a lively peal to celebrate the victory; but neither of us ventured to whisper to the other her lurking fear of what we might have lost on the field of Alma.

Soon came a contradiction of the fall of Sebastopol and confirmation of the battle, with the numbers who had fallen; but still no names. Ah! this agony of suspense! how cruel it is. Mary had come to stay with us, and my brother kept her con-

stantly by him, both of them trying to be cheerful and keep up the other's hopes.

At last came the melancholy list. Pierce's regiment was one of those that had suffered most, and his name was down as severely wounded—"not mortally," Aunt Thomasine bade us observe. We had need of all our fortitude; my poor brother tried to say it was the fortune of war, but his voice shook irrepressibly. When he had looked through the list again, he observed, more steadily: "Alan's regiment was in the hottest of the fight—poor fellow! We had half-forgotten him in our anxiety for my boy."

"The names of the private soldiers are not published, but will be shortly," said my aunt.

A suppressed sob interrupted us: it was poor Mary, who was on her knees by the couch, with her face buried in her arms, weeping bitterly. My brother went and raised her tenderly, but words of comfort he could not speak. In the afternoon, her mother came to fetch her home, and that same evening Hugh left us to go to London. We more than suspected that he would not rest there, and were not surprised when, two days after, he wrote

us word, that he was going to Constantinople, and thence to wherever his son might have been transferred : he also wrote to Mary, bidding her keep a good heart and not despond.

Then came the extraordinary gazette with the full lists of the fallen. Tremulously, forebodingly, did Aunt Thomasine and I cast our eyes down the long, sad column, and too soon, amongst the undistinguished "rank and file," we saw Alan Randal's name; he died in scaling the heights of Alma—died as he had wished—in the midst of the din of battle and the shouts of victory !

Now day by day came particulars of the fight, and instances of remarkable courage were recorded, which might in time carry a sad comfort to bereaved hearts, yet sore and aching over their loss. Pierce's name was mentioned as that of a young officer, who had distinguished himself by an almost reckless bravery ; and the same paragraph told that his wound, though severe, was not likely to be mortal : he had lost the left arm.

"Gallant boy !" cried Aunt Thomasine, weeping as she read : "I am proud of him ! I confess I should have been disappointed if he had escaped without a scratch."

I thought of Mary, and went over to see her : some of my dear, old aunt's spirit had crept into her heart now ; and while she pitifully lamented his sufferings, she exulted in his distinction.

" Yes, Mrs Harley," said her mother, " she is ready to say, like that woman we have heard of, that she will be Pierce's wife if he only have body enough left to hold his soul ! she will make a proper soldier's wife after all : " in support of which, the poor girl hid her face in her hands and wept again as bitterly as ever.

And day by day the stories of the battle multiplied, still increasing our anxiety a hundred-fold, when we heard of the terrible sufferings *after* the battle endured by the wounded on the field. Perhaps our gallant Pierce might have been lying out under the night-sky amongst the dead and dying, while we were gathered quietly about the fireside.

" Ah ! this is terrible indeed ! " cried Aunt Thomasine, as she finished reading an account of the privations and miseries of the poor fellows who had been taken wounded to Scutari. " Terrible indeed. Those were the most fortunate who were killed outright. This was war—this was victory ! glory !

by the sounds of which a nation's whole heart had been stirred; for this were guns fired, bells rung, and banners unfurled! Alas! its more real and lasting trophies are to be found in the empty places by many a hearth: in the mourning-weeds of many a fatherless child and widowed mother! So! it is the fortune of war!

My old kinswoman's enthusiasm cooled down before the plain, awful, newspaper details. It was not the sword only but the pestilence tramping stealthily, yet untiringly, in the wake of victory, and striking down daily the brave, the young, the hopeful: men who seemed to have borne a charmed life in the battle, where death was sown broadcast, sank reluctantly under its insidious poison: to them more terrible "the pestilence that walketh in darkness," than "the sword that destroyeth by noonday."

Then the miserable sufferings, the small chance for life that the wounded seemed to have left them! Was it possible that Pierce should have been better cared for than the hundreds who so sadly died?

Ah! how little Mary wept!—how Aunt Thomasine raved, when they coned over the wretched

hospital and transport details. Difficult, indeed, was it for us to believe them the necessary, inevitable adjuncts of war. . This was the rough reverse of the picture on whose front glory is blazoned ; but we who sat at home waiting painfully for the long-delayed tidings, could only contemplate the dark side, and put our trust in God, and the dear lad's strong constitution and indomitable spirit.

As much as we could we kept from Mary of the dreary picture ; but the poor child suffered terribly from what she already knew.

And ours was but a fraction of the grief, the anxiety, with which so many thousands of hearts were throbbing. Every man in that great army had left some pulses beating painfully at home ; now either dulled with the agonized certainty, or quickened by awful fears of what might be travelling to them with the speed of evil tidings.

Alas ! alas ! how many proud hopes must have fallen with the autumn leaves !—How many stricken souls have sorrowed through the glorious September and October days for those who shall return no more ! God help them !—for it is but sorry comfort to these bereaved ones to know that their loss

is but "the fortune of war!"—But one drop in the sea of sorrows whose waves ever moan a sad echo to the shouts of Victory!

LX.

It was not until the end of the first week in November that we received any tidings from my brother. The days and nights were glorious: the one sunny enough almost to cheat us into the belief that summer still lingered, the other gloriously moonlit and clear.

Mary and I walked on the terrace one night until nearly twelve o'clock. The valley looked as if covered with a faint hoar-frost; we could see the river shining amongst the nearly bare trees, and the old castle at Middleham was distinct in outline as in the daytime.

My little companion was very sad; for our waiting-days seemed as if they grew into a double length, and her heart never ceased its dull aching. I looked at the face which a few months ago had been as the very essence of sunshine; now it was

all wan and colourless. Her golden hair drooped low on her neck, her pretty eyes scarcely ever met mine but they glittered with tears. Her fingers played restlessly with the ring Pierce had given her at parting, as we walked backwards and forwards on the terrace. She had grown so nervous that she started at a shadow on the walk if the wind stirred the trees which overhung the wall.

For the last few days, when disappointed of a letter, we had buoyed ourselves up with the hope that it would come to-morrow ; but many to-morrows went over and found us still waiting and watching.

“ Oh, Mrs Harley ! if this suspense last much longer, I think I shall go mad ! ” cried poor Mary, in a paroxysm of grief and disappointment on the morning of this day, when the usual negative met our inquiries at the post.

I trembled for her health : indeed this anxiety was wearing her down rapidly ; and, in caring for her, my own trouble was compelled to be still : yet my secret care gnawed perpetually at my heart and never let me rest.

These were amongst the saddest days of my life :

a painful certainty is almost less wearing to nerve and health, than this weary sickness of deferred hope.—Alas! it was scarce *hope* now with us, but a longing to know the *worst*.

And when the letter came, it changed but little in our feelings. Hugh had not attempted to shroud from us any possibility of danger: out of the fulness of his heart he had written, and what his own fears were I deciphered too well. But Mary took courage.

“He has leave to come to England, and they will start as soon as Pierce is able to bear it;—perhaps even *now* they are on their way!” she cried, pointing, with trembling finger at this passage of the letter.

I gave it up to her, that she might gather from it what comfort she could; and truly her young heart was a very alchymist for transmuting doubtful sentences into food for hope. The pure gold of life that hope is, and the only coin that passes current with us from its beginning to its end: they are better dowered than a king who carry a full freight of it.

Little Mary was almost gay for a few hours, and

calm enough afterwards to wait patiently another tedious month for more news.

LXI.

“ Now that we have no more anxiety about anybody in the Crimea, we scarcely read the papers—what a shame ! ” remarked Aunt Thomasine, one morning as we sat at breakfast. “ Human nature is very selfish : don’t you think so, Mary ? ”

Mary started out of a reverie ; but not to answer the old lady’s question—to listen to a step advancing to the door : it was a servant who entered with letters. One for me from my brother. Both my aunt and Mary watched my trembling fingers as I broke the seal, and my face as I scanned the few lines it contained. It was dated in London the preceding night, and said that they had arrived in town that day ; that Pierce was so exhausted they should be obliged to rest there for a week, and then they should come down to Thorney—the dear boy fancied he should be sooner restored if he could get back to bonnie Wensleydale.

"In a week ! oh, I am glad !" said Mary, laughing, crying, and blushing all at once : " give me the letter, Mrs Harley—oh, Pierce, Pierce !"—and having possessed herself of the precious missive, she took refuge in her own chamber to enjoy it.

Sweet, winsome thing, no marvel every one loved thee !

The day but one after that, going through the hall, I met the servant carrying the letters to the breakfast-room, and received them from his hand. I can scarce tell what presentiment struck me at the moment ; but, instead of turning back with them to where I had left Aunt Thomasine and Mary a few minutes before, I carried them up to my own room and locked the door. I opened my brother's the first ; it contained not a dozen lines :—

"Pierce is dead, sister," thus it ran : " He died last night. I cannot thank God sufficiently that I was with him, and that he did not die far away from me amongst strangers. His death was painless and happy—what can I say more ?—unless that it was honourable, being won in the discharge of a soldier's duty.—His one regret was, that he did not fall upon the field, like Alan. Our loss, sister, is a cruel one :

how shall we bear it?—I shall come down two days hence. Make preparations to receive what was my son. I should wish to bury him where one day I hope to lay my own bones. If little Mary is with you, break the matter to her; and, unless she wish to see my poor boy, get her home to her mother:—I could not endure the child's grief:—still, if it would comfort her to stay, let it be as she wishes."

Men like Hugh Randal do not put their grief into phrases; but the writing betrayed how the strong hand which traced the lines was shaken by the agony that convulsed his life to its very source. I imagined I could see the father's gray head bowed down beside the coffin of his dead son—every ambition and hope of his existence suddenly snatched from him—prostrate with grief:—yet such were not the feelings his letter showed—it was rather the iron will, nerving him to bear his affliction, which dictated the curt sentences. The tremulous, irregular writing was the involuntary yet irrepressible wavering of natural love and tenderness, which he would have hidden if he could.

Alas, my brother, once more were you alone!—I bent my face down on my bed and wept.

Not long was this allowed me ; a light step came to the door : a knock, and Mary entered. My eyes and the letter in my hand told her all ere I had time to speak. Never shall I forget the bitter, loud cry that burst from her lips : “ Pierce, Pierce ! ”— It brought Aunt Thomasine hurrying to the room : no need of explanation—a look was enough.

LXII.

The twilight had begun to draw in, and it was cold with a soft falling rain. Aunt Thomasine and I were in the chamber that had been prepared for Pierce. We had induced little Mary to lie down, and her mother was with her : it would not do for my brother to see the poor girl at first, for since the fatal news had come, she had done nothing but weep. My aunt was calm and self-possessed now, but it had lain with me to give all the orders and make all the arrangements : I felt nerved, strung-up, excited ; for every one and everything seemed to depend upon me. Till now I had scarcely had time to shed a tear, or to meditate on the greatness

of our bereavement; and, at this moment, I was past it. I had but one idea—how should I meet my brother? How would he be affected?

“It is five o’clock,” observed my aunt.

I looked out from one of the windows on the road, and saw a dark object slowly approaching; at the same moment the bell of Thorney Church began to toll, making a strange echo through the deadly silence of the house. A servant came in and lighted the tall candles that stood about the room; then looked that all was ready on the bed to receive its burden.

“Let us go down into the hall,” whispered my aunt; and, supporting her, we descended the low, old-fashioned staircase, all dimly lighted by tapers, whose flame wavered and flickered in each gust from the open door. The servants, clad in mourning, were clustered together, weeping and talking in whispers of the young master. They had all loved him. A group of men outside, bareheaded in the rain, waited in silence. The sound of the bell fell like a chill touch upon all our hearts, and my aunt shook so violently, that I was obliged to lead her to her room again. As I returned, they were carrying

in the coffin, and my brother stood just within the hall; he clasped my hand in silence, but never took his eyes from the sad burden which was being brought into the house, whence his son had gone forth a few months ago, "burning in high hope" and full of vigorous life. Sobs from the women were audible, and I would have drawn the desolate father away, but he would not stir until he followed the coffin up stairs. It was laid on the bed, and then the bearers went out with cautious step, drew the door close, and left us alone with the dead.

Then I looked up in my brother's face, and our eyes met. Alas, alas! his so darkly mournful, and mine speaking so little comfort! As we stood together silently by the bed, the door opened and little Mary came in; I was shocked at her ghastly face, but, not noticing us, she came and looked on the coffin; she would have sunk to the ground beside it, had not Hugh caught her in his arms: he carried her fainting back to her mother.

He would then have returned to the chamber of death, but I laid my hand softly on his, saying; "Not any more to-night, Hugh;" and he yielded to my tone of entreaty, and let me accompany him

to the parlour. Pierce's portrait hung in its place still; at the sight of it, his self-command broke down, and, covering his face with his hands, he wept aloud, crying like him of old; "My son, my son! would that I had died for thee!"

The grief of men is terrible to see: tears from their eyes fall like molten lead, searing, burning; every drop a pang—not, as with women, a relief.

On the morrow we looked for the last time upon the fine, wasted face of the young soldier: even little Mary stifled her passionate grief, and gazed incredulously for a minute on the marble features. Could this mask of clay, lying in rigid immobility, be her gay, high-hearted lover? She hid her eyes, where tears had quenched sight as she gazed, and turned away: there was no loud outbreak of agony now—it would have seemed like profanation in that awful presence. Hugh himself drew up the linen sheet over the face of his son, and then we went out of the chamber together. On the following day all that was mortal of Pierce Randal was committed to the dust, amidst the unspeakable grief of

friends and relatives : his grave was watered with tears indeed !

LXIII.

The contest still goes on, but we know the worst : there is no more weary, aching anxiety, no more looking for tidings amongst us : the tragedy is being acted with fearful sameness daily by other hearths ; but we sit in the deep shadow early fallen, waiting till time shall bring us resignation.

It is sad to see my brother : yet he struggles hard to bear his sorrow as it becomes a good man to do. The gray hair on his temples is almost silver now, the lines round his mouth and on his brow grow more marked, and I have not seen a smile in his kindly eyes since the earth closed over his son. It is finished now—all the life-long ambition, all the proud hopes, all the happiness imparting care : the story of his life is done : what remains is but as notes and reflections on the past, which were summed up long ago by a great king, “ All is vanity.” All of life is vanity save its end.

There are many years before him, according to man's common lot: these will not be wasted. A few months may well be given to sorrow for such a son, but it will not swallow up all besides: never will he cease to regret, but he will not always mourn. No; the days will come, by and by, when his strong heart will rise up from its desolation, and his hand will be eager to do good, as formerly: when he will love to dwell on the details of his son's brave death, and when it will be a pleasure to him to cite the instances of nobleness and truth the lad showed when he was younger. Even already he has said, like that bereaved father of whom history speaks so touchingly, "I would not exchange my dead son for any living son in Christendom!" He can think of him always with pride, and that is comfort. And little Mary, on whose heart the blight of anguish has fallen so soon, will still find light in the world; the warm love she bore to Pierce will not darken it for ever: still may she be a happy mother of children, a wife tender and true,—not wasting her life with folded hands and useless mourning; listless, hopeless; a

burden to herself and others. There is better stuff in her, else I think Pierce had not loved her so well; and to take peace of soul when time offers it, and a second love, when the first is buried for ever, is not being light or false, but simply true to nature and nature's inevitable changes. She may not—I think she never will—meet one so truly good and high-hearted as Pierce; but it is a necessity of her nature to love some one: she may keep his memory always, but she will not for it sacrifice every charm of life.

LXIV.

Coiled up on a cushion before the fire, even as I write, there lies basking in the warmth, a boy, wild, untamed, yet beautiful,—his black eyes wander restlessly over the group; he is not accustomed to us yet, for it is but a few days since we took him from his dead mother. The great victory has made him an orphan, as it has made Hugh childless—he is Alan's son.

He will be the heir.

My brother, who is pacing the room, pauses sometimes and looks at him reflectively, then goes on. In all care and kindness, he will be a father to young Alan; but the boy can never, never be as a son to him: Pierce's place must be empty always. Though unacknowledged, it is pleasant to know that one of his name *may* come after him; but we cannot know yet what passions lurk under that gipsy face.

As he lies there, he falls asleep, and Aunt Thomasine, who has taken him into her heart of hearts already, winds up a long train of reflections which have had him for their text, with a blessing, "God speed him well!" And we all echo it, though with a thought of that solitary grave lying out under the cold moonlight, which holds the dust of so many hopes.

The wild winter winds have begun to blow; Christmas is close at hand. In many homes will empty places be counted then; in many hearts will mournful echoes ring to the old chimes of loving remembrance. Amidst our tears and our regrets,

may the spirit of the time come to us with a soothing whisper of that other home, where those who are gone before wait for us, and where parting cannot be, "nor death, nor weeping any more for ever!"

THE END.

•

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